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THE ELECTION CONTROVERSY AMONG LUTHERANS
IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY:
AN EXAMINATION OF THE UNDERLYING PROBLEMS

by

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ABSTRACT

The Election Controversy among Lutherans in the Twentieth Century: An Examination of the Underlying Problems.

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The Election Controversy of the nineteenth century re-shaped the face of confessional Lutheranism in America. The Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America, the leading voice of confessional Lutheranism in America, bore the brunt of the dispute and ultimately dissolved. This dissertation examines the Election Controversy with special attention to the twentieth century attempts to resolve it in order to discover the underlying problems that have prevented the opposing sides from reaching a resolution. The dissertation is written from the viewpoint of the Wisconsin Synod, one of the synods involved in the controversy but often ignored in the discussion of it. The study is needed because contemporary observers do not have a good understanding of confessional Lutheranism and Lutheranism's historic emphasis on doctrinal purity. The dissertation demonstrates that the underlying causes of the controversy and the failures to resolve it were departures from Luther's approach to theology and from the historic Lutheran stress on doctrine and doctrinal agreement for the expression of church fellowship.

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INTRODUCTION

Hans Robert Haug produced a massive (961 pages) study of the Election Controversy in 1967 entitled, *The Predestination Controversy in the Lutheran Church in North America*.¹ This Ph.D. dissertation (Temple University) concentrated on the controversy in the nineteenth century and included only brief comments on the twentieth century aspects in the epilogue. Haug also did not address the reasons why the twentieth century efforts to resolve the controversy failed. In addition, he paid little attention to the role of the Wisconsin Synod in the controversy.

Charles F. Bunzel wrote a master's thesis on the Chicago (Intersynodical) Theses in 1964 (Concordia Seminary, St. Louis) entitled, *The Missouri Synod and the Chicago Theses*.² To my knowledge this is the only serious study of the intersynodical movement and the theses the movement produced. Bunzel, however, devotes only ten pages to a discussion of the free conferences of the first decade of the twentieth century. His thesis also does not include the Wisconsin Synod. The purpose of Bunzel's study was to discover why the negotiations of the Intersynodical Committee and the theses the committee produced failed to resolve the Election Controversy. He claims that the efforts failed because the Missouri Synod's theologians, who were not on the Intersynodical Committee, focused their attention on past history rather than determining whether there was agreement on the doctrines in question at the time. I believe that his conclusion is simplistic and faulty.

Furthermore, both Haug and Bunzel write from a perspective of modern ecumenism which often fails to grasp the historic Lutheran stress on agreement in doctrine for the unity of the church and the expression of fellowship between groups of Christians. Since both Haug and Bunzel exclude the Wisconsin Synod from their studies, they do not offer a complete presentation of the issues. I believe that a new study is necessary to offer a more comprehensive picture.

¹ Hans Robert Haug, *The Predestination Controversy in the Lutheran Church in North America*. Ph.D. Dissertation, Temple University, 1967.

² Charles F. Bunzel, *The Missouri Synod and the Chicago (Intersynodical) Theses*. Masters Thesis, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO. 1964.

Such a study can shed light on the differences between Lutherans in America today. To a certain extent, the differences that became evident during the Election Controversy are still apparent in the present alignment of the various Lutheran synods.

There is a much more basic reason for the failure of the twentieth century attempts to resolve the controversy than Bunzel suggests. The root of the problem was that the two sides differed in their approach to Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions and in their understanding of the historic Lutheran emphasis on the importance of agreement in doctrine for the unity for the church and the expression of church fellowship. The Lutheran doctrine of church fellowship is intimately involved in the failures to resolve the Election Controversy in the twentieth century. These differences continue to divide Lutheranism in America and the divisions will not be mended without a resolution of these differences.

Many in contemporary America have trouble understanding the underlying issues and motives of sharp doctrinal disputes like the Election Controversy. Such controversies are often quickly dismissed as irrelevant to the contemporary religious scene. The contemporary scene, however, is shaped by past experience. If people do not understand that experience they cannot hope to understand current differences and contemporary problems. This study explains why the two sides initially considered these doctrinal issues so important that they would forfeit an outward unity rather than compromise their teachings even when that outward unity seemed to offer so many benefits. The failure to resolve the doctrinal differences between synods in the nineteenth century caused a break between synods in the nineteenth century and again in the twentieth century.

This study will also explain the failures to resolve the controversy. Even when union movements succeeded in establishing outward union, there was no real resolution of the basic issues. Doctrinal differences came to be seen as irrelevant. This attitude marked a departure from the historic Lutheran stress on doctrine and doctrinal agreement for the expression of church fellowship.

This is a critical historical-theological analysis of the Election Controversy in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Midwestern Lutheranism and the efforts to resolve it. The background necessary to understand the origins of the controversy and the subsequent efforts to resolve it is provided first of all by examining the doctrine of election and Lutheran theological characteristics in the writings of Martin Luther, Philipp Melanchthon, the *Formula of Concord*, and the Lutheran dogmaticians in the Age of Orthodoxy. Secondly, the study examines the major essays, articles, and theses produced during the Election Controversy among Midwestern Lutherans in the nineteenth century to show the issues which separated the two sides in the conflict. The study then explores the attempts to resolve the Election Controversy in the twentieth century by examining the major essays, articles, theses, and convention resolutions of the participants to show the reasons for the failure to resolve the controversy.

In this dissertation I contend first of all that the two sides in the controversy had a basic difference in approach to Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions and in understanding the historic Lutheran emphasis on the importance of agreement in doctrine for the unity of the church.. Secondly, I contend that the genuine Lutheran emphasis on doctrinal purity was compromised to some extent in Midwestern Lutheranism in the Election Controversy which divided various Lutheran synods in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and was the cause in the 1950s and early 1960s of a major break between the Missouri and Wisconsin Lutheran Synods. The long American debate on the meaning of election and conversion also involved issues of the fundamental criteria for church fellowship.

The Lutheran emphasis on purity of doctrine and on the understanding of divine election, of course, had its roots in Luther's theology and the Age of Orthodoxy as Luther and his followers distinguished the Lutheran position from Roman Catholicism and the one hand, and Calvin and the Reformed tradition on the other. I argue here that the Wisconsin Synod, in fact, was more in continuity with Luther's emphasis on preserving the purity of doctrine and his understanding of divine election than were some of the other Lutheran Synods in the Midwest.

Chapter one explores key aspects of Lutheran theology in the Reformation and Post-Reformation eras to demonstrate that the seeds of the Election Controversy in the nineteenth century in America were sown already in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. Martin Luther (1483-1546) and the Lutheran Confessions are consistent in ascribing the cause of salvation to God alone apart from any human merit or effort. In his later years Philipp Melancthon (1497-1560) began to speak of a cause of conversion also in human beings. The Lutheran systematicians in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries began explaining the doctrine of election using the expression, “election *intuitu fidei*” (election in view of faith). This expression was at the heart of the election controversy among Midwestern Lutherans in America in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The Election Controversy in America also involved differences in approach to Scripture, the Lutheran Confessions, and the theological task. Lutheran theologians in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and early eighteenth century are consistent in their stress on the importance of doctrine and doctrinal agreement.

Chapter two first sets the stage historically to understand the setting in America and the trends in Lutheranism in this country. Then the causes of the controversy and the various theological issues involved in it are presented. The issues in the controversy resulted from differences in the approach to theology. One side followed Luther and the Lutheran Confessions. The other side insisted on the terminology and theological approach of the dogmaticians of the Age of Orthodoxy and began to place a stress on human reason in theology that marked a departure from Luther’s approach to theology.

Chapter three examines the first attempts to resolve the Election Controversy through free conferences in the first decade of the Twentieth century. Although these free conferences began with high expectations, no agreements could be reached because of key differences in the approach to the theological task. The differences came to a head in the expression *analogy of faith*. This chapter discusses these differences and demonstrates that a resolution of the

controversy could not be reached because of a basic disagreement in hermeneutics and approach to the theology.

Chapter four demonstrates that the union efforts among Norwegian Lutherans did not result in a true resolution of the Election Controversy but in doctrinal compromise. The theological disputes among the various Norwegian synods were complicated and included conflicts over atonement, justification, the gospel, absolution, Sunday observance, lay preaching and the public ministry, as well as the doctrine of election. The conflicts were intensified by a number of conflicts over church polity and ecclesiastical practice. Many of the disputes reflect conflicts that were already going on in Norway. The chapter notes a number of reasons why the push for union was so strong that confessional Lutherans became willing to sacrifice doctrinal clarity. Those reasons include Norwegian ethnic pride, weariness of fighting over doctrine particularly among the laity, the process of Americanization, the Intersynodical production of worship materials in English, and the ecumenical spirit of the times that favored outward unity without regard to doctrinal agreement. The eventual union was achieved at the expense of glossing over the doctrinal conflict that still existed.

Chapter five offers an overview of the Intersynodical Movement to determine why the venture failed to attain its goal of bringing about a settlement of the controversy that divided Midwestern Lutheranism. Several answers are proposed. The spirit of the times fostered union at the price of true doctrinal unity. Doctrinal indifference was on the rise. The Iowa Synod's historic position on "open questions" led to a willingness to ignore certain doctrinal differences while the synods of the Synodical Conference insisted on full doctrinal unity for expressions of church fellowship. The chapter also suggests that the members of the Intersynodical Committee were not always on the same page theologically as others in their respective synods.

Chapter six deals with the Intersynodical Controversy that began in 1938 and culminated in fellowship ties being terminated in the early 1960s. This chapter demonstrates that Missouri's official change in the understanding of church fellowship resulted in a disregard for the historic

differences between the Missouri Synod and the ALC in the doctrines of election, conversion, and open questions. The issues dating back to the Election Controversy became non-issues for the Missouri Synod while they remained issues for the Wisconsin Synod and the Norwegian Synod. In Missouri's quest for fellowship with the ALC the importance of doctrine faded into the background. The issue in the doctrine of election was not that Missouri had adopted election *intuitu fidei* but that the Missouri Synod was no longer concerned that such a teaching must be clearly excluded by any confessional statement claiming to resolve past differences. As a result the Missouri Synod forfeited longstanding fellowship with the Wisconsin Synod and the Norwegian Synod.

CHAPTER ONE

THE LUTHERAN DOCTRINE OF ELECTION IN THE REFORMATION AND AGE OF ORTHODOXY

The election controversy among Lutherans in America in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries cannot be understood without an examination of Lutheran theology from Luther through the age of orthodoxy.³ The starting point for Lutheran theology from Luther through the age of orthodoxy has always been the grace of God rather than the sovereignty of God. The doctrine of predestination or election was not a matter for speculation, but a teaching of comfort for the believer. At the center of Lutheran theology is the doctrine of justification by grace through faith. Luther was primarily concerned with the salvation of the sinner. The doctrine of election serves to guarantee salvation *sola gratia* and to give comfort to the sinner.

Martin Luther (1483-1546) and the Lutheran Confessions are consistent in ascribing the cause of salvation to God alone apart from any human merit or effort. In his later years Philipp Melancthon (1497-1560) began to speak of a cause of conversion in human beings. The Lutheran systematicians in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries began explaining the doctrine of election using the expression, “election *intuitu fidei*” (election in view of faith). This expression was at the heart of the election controversy among Midwestern Lutherans in America in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The Election Controversy in America also involved differences in approach to Scripture, the Lutheran Confessions, and the theological task. These differences can be seen in incipient form during the Reformation and Post-Reformation eras.

This chapter explores key aspects of Lutheran theology in the Reformation and Post-Reformation eras to demonstrate that the seeds of the Election Controversy in nineteenth century America were sown already in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries.

³ The age of orthodoxy can be dated from the publishing of the Book of Concord in 1580 to the death of the last great representatives of Lutheran orthodoxy, David Hollaz (d. 1713) and Ernst Valentin Loescher (d. 1749).

Lutheran Doctrine in the Age of the Reformation

Luther's concept of reformation was somewhat unique compared with the reformers who preceded him. Luther believed that the reformation the church needed was primarily doctrinal rather than moral or ecclesiastical.⁴ Doctrine is the source of life. Therefore doctrine is more important than the Christian life or Christian love. For Luther doctrine shows the way to heaven and consequently cannot be treated as unimportant or uncertain. In his lectures on Galatians (1535) he explains,

With the utmost rigor we demand that all the articles of Christian doctrine, both large and small—although we do not regard any of them as small—be kept pure and certain. This is supremely necessary. For this doctrine is our only light, which illumines and directs us and shows us the way to heaven; if it is overthrown in one point, it must be overthrown completely. And when that happens, our love will not be of any use to us. . . . Therefore there is no comparison at all between doctrine and life. “One dot” of doctrine is worth more than “heaven and earth” (Matt. 5:18); therefore we do not permit the slightest offense against it. But we can be lenient toward errors of life.⁵

Good works flow from faith. Therefore correct doctrine is the source of morality because faith flows from correct doctrine, not from false doctrine. Luther writes,

When we speak about godliness and ungodliness we are not speaking about manners, but about convictions which are the fountainheads of the moral life. The man who is orthodox concerning God cannot help but do good works and be good in his life. Even if he falls seven times a day, he rises again just as many times. But the ungodly fall to the ground and do not rise again.⁶

The importance of doctrine for Luther can be seen in his refusal to give Zwingli (1481-1531) the right hand of fellowship at the Marburg Colloquy (1529). Luther refused fellowship

⁴ Owen Chadwick, *The Reformation*. The Penguin History of the Christian Church, vol. 3 (London: Penguin Books, 1972), 13-14. Heiko Oberman, *Luther: Man between God and the Devil*. (New York: Image Books, 1992), 56-57.

⁵ Martin Luther. *Lectures on Galatians*(1535), in *Luther's Works* American Edition (55 vols.; ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann; Philadelphia: Muehlenberg and Fortress, and St. Louis: Concordia, 1955-86), 27:41. Hereafter the citations of this series will be LW.

⁶ *D. Martin Luthers Werke: kritische Gesamtausgabe* (121 volumes, Weimar, 1883-2009), 5:28. Hereafter, cited as WA. Quoted in *The Doctrine of Man in Classical Lutheran Theology*. ed. by Herman A. Preus & Edmund Smits (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1962; Concordia Heritage reprint, 1982), x.

with Zwingli because the two parties were not agreed as to whether the body and blood of Christ are truly present with the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper.⁷ From a military standpoint it would have been advantageous for the German and Swiss reformers to present a united front against the forces of the Holy Roman Empire. However, for Luther doctrine was not to be compromised even if it meant physical harm. Doctrine was not to be compromised because it was God's doctrine, not Luther's. "In theology a tiny error overthrows the whole teaching. . . Doctrine belongs to God, not to us; and we are called only as its ministers. Therefore we cannot even give up a dot of it (Matt. 5:18)."⁸

The importance of doctrine for Luther and Lutheranism is reflected in Lutheranism's attitude toward public creeds and confessions. A confession of faith is a Christian's statement of what he believes on the basis of God's Word. For Luther making a confession of faith was not optional for the Christian. Commenting on Romans 10:10 Luther declares, "It is impossible for anyone to be saved who does not confess with his lips what one believes in the heart."⁹ A Christian not only makes assertions on the basis of God's Word, he delights in doing so.¹⁰ Making a public confession gives consolation, defends against heresy and error, and serves for the betterment of brothers and sisters in Christ.¹¹

Luther produced his own brief, private confession of faith in 1528 entitled, "Confession concerning the Lord's Supper." He explained his reason for doing so. He wanted people to know what he taught and believed on the basis of his careful searching of the Holy Scriptures. The purpose of the confession was to keep people from appealing to Luther to support error. Written confessions distinguish between truth and error on the basis of Scripture. Luther writes,

I see that schisms and errors are increasing proportionately with the passage of time, and that there is no end to the rage and fury of Satan. Hence lest any persons during my

⁷ Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: Shaping and Defining the Reformation, 1521-1532*. trans. by James L. Schaaf (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 333.

⁸ LW, 27:37.

⁹ LW, 25:90.

¹⁰ LW, 33:19-20.

¹¹ LW 38:224-225.

lifetime or after my death appeal to me or misuse my writings to confirm their error, as the sacramentarian and Baptist fanatics are already beginning to do, I desire with this treatise to confess my faith before God and all the world, point by point. . . Hence if anyone should say after my death, “If Luther were living now, he would teach and hold this or that article differently, for he did not consider it sufficiently,” etc., let me say once and for all that I have most diligently traced all these articles through the Scriptures, have examined them again and again in the light thereof, and have wanted to defend all of them as certainly as I have now defended the sacrament of the altar.¹²

Sometimes the church must produce a written confession to clarify and explain its teachings and to distance itself from error. Luther regarded the historic creeds of the church as binding. In the *Smalcald Articles* Luther appeals to the Apostles and Athanasian Creeds in his article on the Trinity. A brief treatment and an appeal to the creeds was enough for Luther because this doctrine was not in conflict between the Lutheran and papal parties.¹³

The Lutheran Church was born when the *Augsburg Confession* was presented to Emperor Charles V at the Diet of Augsburg on June 25, 1530. The evangelical princes and theologians in the territories of the Reformation united behind this statement of faith. The confession served the purpose of uniting the evangelical or Lutheran party, clarifying their rejection of many ancient heresies, distancing themselves from Zwingli and the Anabaptists, and pointing out the areas of agreement and disagreement with Rome. Luther was pleased with the confession and its public presentation. In letters following June 25 he called it a “most beautiful confession.” He rejoiced because Christ was publicly proclaimed when the teachings of the evangelical party were confessed.¹⁴

Luther wrote a confession of faith in 1537 to be presented at the proposed General Council at Mantua. This confession, which became known as the *Smalcald Articles*, eventually received confessional status in the Lutheran Church and was included in the *Book of Concord* of 1580. Luther was careful to note that the articles had been unanimously adopted and that the

¹² LW, 37:360.

¹³ *Smalcald Articles*, I, 4. Hereafter, SA, cited according to article and paragraph number. *The Book of Concord*. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, ed. Charles Arand, Eric Gritsch, Robert Kolb, William Russell, James Schaaf, Jane Strohl, and Timothy J. Wengert, trans. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000.

¹⁴ LW, 49:354-355.

representatives of the Lutheran party were willing to take their stand on this public document and presentation of their faith and teaching.¹⁵ For Lutherans a confession is meant to unite and must be adopted as a common declaration of faith. A confession is meaningless unless people are willing to take a stand on it. Both the *Augsburg Confession* and the *Smalcald Articles* were signed by those who were willing to say publicly that this was their confession, an expression of what they believed on the basis of the Holy Scriptures. Princes and territorial representatives rather than theologians signed the *Augsburg Confession* because it was presented at a German Diet of the Holy Roman Empire. The *Augsburg Confession* was originally intended not only to be statement of belief, but also a defense of the rulers concerning the reformation they were allowing to be carried out in their territories. Theologians rather than governmental officials affixed the signatures to the *Smalcald Articles* because this document was to be presented to a General Council of the Church. In both cases the signers recognized the importance of making a public confession to clarify what they believed on the basis of Scripture, to promote unity, and to reject error.

Crucial for understanding the importance of doctrine for Luther and his followers is understanding the central role of Scripture. Luther seems to have come to an understanding of the reformation principle of *sola scriptura* before he grasped *sola gratia* and *sola fide*.¹⁶ In his studies Luther began to doubt the reliability of human reason and tradition for doctrine and faith. He came to question both the authority of tradition and the claims of the enthusiasts who believed that the Holy Spirit comes to people directly apart from the external word. Tradition, scholastic theology, and every teaching apart from God's Word are useless to strengthen minds or pacify the conscience.¹⁷ God's Word asserts Christian freedom based on Christ's work of redemption and does not allow one to be brought into bondage by human traditions and laws.¹⁸ For Luther the

¹⁵ SA, Preface, 2.

¹⁶ See Oberman, *Luther: Man between God and the Devil*, 161, 164, 192, 221.

¹⁷ LW, 17:250.

¹⁸ LW, 33:54.

Scriptures are sufficient for faith and the Christian life. No other source is necessary or possible.

He declares, “The Word of God—and no one else, not even an angel—should establish articles of faith.”¹⁹ Commenting on Galatians 1:9 Luther writes,

Here Paul subordinates himself, an angel from heaven, teachers on earth, and any other masters at all to sacred Scripture. This queen must rule, and everyone must obey, and be subject to her. The pope, Luther, Augustine, Paul, an angel from heaven—these should not be masters, judges, or arbiters but only witnesses, disciples, and confessors of Scripture. Nor should anything be taught or heard in the church except the Word of God. Otherwise let the teachers and the hearers be accursed along with their doctrine.²⁰

The purpose of Scripture is to point to Christ. The Bible reveals God’s plan of salvation. Without Scripture the way to salvation would remain a mystery. Without Christ Scripture is meaningless.

For what still sublimer thing can remain hidden in the Scriptures, now that the seals have been broken, the stone rolled from the door of the sepulcher [Matt. 27:66, 28:2], and the supreme mystery brought to light, namely that God is three and one, that Christ has suffered for us and is to reign eternally? . . . Take Christ out of Scripture and what will you find left in them?²¹

Luther believed in the efficacy of Scripture. He also asserted that God does not give his Spirit or impart his grace to anyone apart from or before contact with the external Word.²² The external Word is the Word that strikes the senses. Summaries of scriptural teaching and the proclamation of God’s Word are God’s Word because they convey the meaning of Scripture. Luther was very much opposed to the Anabaptists and the radical reformers who believed that the Holy Spirit converts or strengthens faith directly apart from the means of grace.²³ Rather than a direct or immediate working of the Holy Spirit he believed in a mediate working through Word and Sacraments. Luther believed that if God’s Word is being proclaimed, the Holy Spirit is bringing sinners to faith. You cannot separate the work of the Holy Spirit from God’s Word. He was so certain that God’s Word would never return without accomplishing God’s plan and

¹⁹ SA, Part II, 2, par. 15.

²⁰ LW, 26:57-58.

²¹ LW, 33:25-26.

²² SA, III, 8, 3-13.

²³ See “Against the Heavenly Prophets,” LW, 40:79-223.

purpose that he wrote, “And even if no other sign than this alone, it would still suffice to prove that a Christian, holy people must exist there, for God’s Word cannot be without God’s people and conversely, God’s people cannot be without God’s Word.”²⁴

Luther saw the Bible as the sacred page.²⁵ God is the author. Lecturing on Genesis 29:1-3 Luther addressed the inclusion of the mundane on the pages of Scripture. He concludes, “If we believed firmly as I do, even though I believe weakly, that the Holy Spirit and God, the Creator of all things, is the Author of this book and of such unimportant matters, as they seem to our flesh, then we would have the greatest consolation.”²⁶ He says that the Holy Spirit himself composed Psalm 90.²⁷ Since the Holy Scriptures are God’s Word they cannot lie to us.²⁸ The holy teachers of the church can err, but Scripture has never erred.²⁹ For that reason one cannot give preference to human authority over the Holy Scriptures. “Human beings can err, but the Word of God is the very wisdom of God and the absolutely infallible truth.”³⁰

Luther also believed in the basic perspicuity or clarity of Scripture. He vehemently disagreed with Erasmus (ca. 1469-1536) and others who claimed that the Bible was obscure. Scripture claims clarity when God’s Word is called a “lamp to my feet and a light for my path.”³¹ The Bible brings light for believers, but blindness and shame for unbelievers.

God’s Word has to be the most marvelous thing in heaven and on earth. That is why it must at one and the same time do two opposite things, namely, give perfect light and glory to those who believe it, and bring utter blindness and shame upon those who believe it not. To the former it must be the most certain and best known of all things; to the latter it must be the most unknown and obscure of all things. The former must extol and praise it above all things; the latter must blaspheme and slander it above all things. So does it operate to perfection and achieve in the hearts of men no insignificant works,

²⁴ LW, 41:150.

²⁵ See Kenneth Hagen, *Luther’s Approach to Scripture as seen in his “Commentaries” on Galatians 1519-1538*. (Tuebingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1993), 17ff.

²⁶ LW, 5:275.

²⁷ LW, 13:81.

²⁸ *Large Catechism*, V, 76. Hereafter, LC. *The Book of Concord*. Robert Kold and RTimothy J. Wengert, ed. Charles Arand, Eric Gritsch, Robert Kolb, William Russell, James Schaaf, Jane Strohl, and Timothy J. Wengert, trans. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000.

²⁹ LW, 32:11.

³⁰ LW, 1:122.

³¹ LW, 33:92ff.

but strange and terrible works. As St. Paul says in II Corinthians 4 [:3]. If our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing.³²

Scripture is important because it reveals the God who would otherwise be hidden. Luther carefully maintained the distinction between the hidden (unrevealed) God and the revealed God. In so far as God has not revealed himself “there is no faith, no knowledge, and no understanding.”³³ He has revealed himself both by sending his Son into the world and by giving the Holy Scriptures. God’s majesty is hidden in Christ³⁴ who brings us into God’s kingdom through his Word and Baptism. We can, therefore, seek and acknowledge God only in Christ.³⁵ We can find Christ only in the Holy Scriptures. We find him in Baptism and the Lord’s Supper because God’s Word and promises are attached to the sacraments. In fact, God “hides Himself when He takes His Word and grace away and leaves us with our endeavors and plans.”³⁶ We must not try to peer into the mysteries of God that he has not revealed to us. They are unknowable and are none of our concern. Indeed God has forbidden such investigation.³⁷

Luther also notes that because of original sin even the revealed wisdom of God “is hidden under the appearance of stupidity, and truth under the form of lying—for so the Word of God, as it often comes, comes in a form contrary to our own thinking. . . .”³⁸

Luther recognized human reason as a gift of God.³⁹ However, he was suspicious of human reason because reason is corrupted by sin. Reason is always to serve (ministerial use) rather than be exalted above Scripture (magisterial use) and stand in judgment over God’s Word.

³² LW, 45:146-147.

³³ LW, 5:44.

³⁴ Some claim that this emphasis on the hidden God is a key difference between Luther and Calvin. Luther believed that faith “must be given to one to see the power and love of God in his [Christ’s] lowliness.” See John Dillenberger and Claude Welch. *Protestant Christianity: Interpreted through Its Development* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1954) 43-45.

³⁵ LW, 28:126.

³⁶ LW, 17:279.

³⁷ LW, 5:44.

³⁸ LW, 25:438-439.

³⁹ *Small Catechism*, Explanation to the 1st Article of the Creed; hereafter, SC. LC, 1st Article, 2. *The Book of Concord*. Robert Kold and Timothy J. Wengert, ed.

We are “to be content with the words of God and believe quite simply what they say.”⁴⁰ We are to pay attention to the grammar⁴¹ and the original languages.⁴² We are to take the words of Scripture in their ordinary grammatical sense.⁴³ We are to give attention to “the text itself and what precedes and follows it, from which the meaning should be sought”⁴⁴ and to the subject matter and intention of the speaker.⁴⁵ These are all proper uses of reason.

The magisterial use of reason is to be condemned because reason is clouded by sin making the teachings of God’s Word appear to be foolish.

For faith speaks as follows: “I believe thee, God, when Thou dost speak.” What does God say? Things that are impossible, untrue, foolish, weak, absurd, abominable, heretical, diabolical—if you consult reason. For what is more ridiculous, foolish, and impossible than when God says to Abraham that he is to get a son from the body of Sarah, which is barren and already dead?⁴⁶

Luther taught that human reason after the fall is totally corrupt. “The blindness of human reason is so incomprehensible and infinite that it cannot form sound judgments even about life and works, much less about the doctrine of faith.”⁴⁷ Even in believers the sinful flesh and human reason resist the Spirit.⁴⁸ That is why the Christian must not allow reason to stand in judgment over Scripture, but must take his reason captive to God’s Word.

But what is more preposterous than that we undertake to sit in judgment on God and his Word, we who ought to be judged by God? Therefore we must simply maintain that when we hear God saying something, we are to believe it and not to debate about it but rather take our intellect captive in the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 10:5).⁴⁹

Luther was generally critical of the use of Aristotle because the great philosopher was an unbeliever whose use of reason therefore could not be trusted in religious matters.⁵⁰ Luther complained that Aristotle did not know the true God but had devised a god who only

⁴⁰ LW, 33:175.

⁴¹ LW, 33:167.

⁴² LW, 33:216.

⁴³ LW, 33:217, 236.

⁴⁴ LW, 33:234.

⁴⁵ LW, 33:239.

⁴⁶ LW, 26:227.

⁴⁷ LW, 27:57.

⁴⁸ LW, 27:54.

⁴⁹ LW, 1:157.

⁵⁰ LW, 51:64.

contemplates himself and will not look at suffering or injustice.⁵¹ Aristotle denied that God had created the heavens and the earth and asserted that the world existed from eternity.⁵² In “Against Latomus” Luther calls the philosopher the “twice accursed Aristotle.”⁵³ He faults Thomas Aquinas (1224/27-1274) because he believes Thomas is responsible for the “reign of Aristotle, the destroyer of doctrine.”⁵⁴ Luther did not necessarily reject everything Aristotle wrote,⁵⁵ but he faulted the use of Aristotle in theology by the scholastics and condemned the impression these theologians gave that there was complete agreement between Aristotle and the teachings of Christ and Paul.⁵⁶ He rejected the scholastics’ claim that no one could be a theologian without Aristotle.⁵⁷

Luther believed that the Christian should not use his reason to try to eliminate apparent contradictions in Scripture. Luther’s own thought in many ways is characterized by his use of paradox based on the paradoxes he saw in Scripture. Luther noted that Scripture teaches that God both punishes sin and forgives sin. Luther used a paradox when he taught that we must always flee from God to God, *i.e.*, from the wrath of God to the mercy of God.⁵⁸ One of Luther’s better-known paradoxes is his teaching that a Christian is at the same time saint and sinner (*simul justus et peccator*). Although a Christian remains a sinner after Baptism, his sins are not imputed.⁵⁹ Luther’s teaching of justification by faith alone involves a paradox: We are justified not because we are righteous, but because Christ is righteous. By nature human beings think in terms of rewards for proper behavior and punishment for improper behavior. Luther’s teaching involves a rational paradox for human beings in that “in the place of the logical equivalence of morality,

⁵¹ LW, 33:171, 291.

⁵² LW, 37:30-31.

⁵³ LW, 32:217.

⁵⁴ LW, 32:258.

⁵⁵ e.g., Aristotle can be used to improve temporal life, to learn a trade or civil law, but not for the edification of the soul. LW, 52:39.

⁵⁶ Siegbert Becker, *The Foolishness of God: The Place of Reason in the Theology of Martin Luther*. (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1982), 7. See LW, 51:64-65.

⁵⁷ LW, 52:178.

⁵⁸ Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther: An Introduction to His Life and Work*. Robert C. Schultz, trans. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 171.

⁵⁹ LW, 32:19-29.

reward and punishment He (Christ) puts forgiveness.”⁶⁰ This recognition of paradoxes in Scripture can also be seen in Luther’s teaching on law and gospel.

Central to Luther’s approach to Scripture is his understanding of the difference and distinction between the law and the gospel. He writes,

Now the first sermon, and doctrine, is the law of God. The second is the gospel. These two sermons are not the same. Therefore we must have a good grasp of the matter in order to differentiate between them. We must know what the law is, and what the gospel is. The law commands and requires us to do certain things. The law is thus directed solely to our behavior and consists in making requirements. . . The gospel, however, does not preach what we are to do or avoid. It sets up no requirements but reverses the approach of the law, does the very opposite and says, “This is what God has done for you, he has let his Son be made flesh for you, has let him be put to death for your sake.” So, then, there are two kinds of doctrines and two kinds of works, those of God and those of men. Just as we and God are separated from one another, so also these two doctrines are widely separated from one another. For the gospel teaches exclusively what has been given us by God, and not—as in the case of the law—what we are to do and give to God.⁶¹

Both the law and the gospel are God’s Word. Each has its own purpose and is to be used as God intended. The chief purpose of the law is to show us our sins. The law does not show us what we are able to do, but what we ought to do. The law makes us recognize our inability to do what God commands.⁶² The law is like a mirror which reveals our sin, but it does not have the power to free us from our sin.⁶³ If the law had not revealed our sin and our inability to do what God commands, the gospel would be meaningless. Nevertheless, only the gospel reveals that all of our sins have been forgiven for Christ’s sake. We obtain that forgiveness by faith.⁶⁴

Luther had a strong sense of original sin and its effects on human beings. He believed that human beings could not begin to grasp the depths of their sinfulness apart from God’s revelation. He confessed, “This inherited sin has caused such a deep, evil corruption of nature that reason does not comprehend it; rather it must be believed on the basis of the revelation in the

⁶⁰ Werner Ehlert, *The Structure of Lutheranism*. Walter A. Hansen, trans. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1962), 98.

⁶¹ LW, 35:162.

⁶² LW, 33:137-138.

⁶³ LW, 22:143-144.

⁶⁴ LW, 22:146-148.

Scriptures (Ps. 51[:5]) and (Rom. 5[:12]); Exod. 33[:20]); Gen. 3[6ff.]).”⁶⁵ He argued that human beings are born spiritually blind, are under the dominion of Satan, and imprisoned in darkness.⁶⁶ Sinful human beings do not have free choice because that is a term that can properly applied to God alone.⁶⁷ In conversion human beings are purely passive. They do nothing, but become something by God’s power.⁶⁸ Luther confesses, “I believe that by my own understanding or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him, but instead the Holy Spirit has called me by the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, made me holy and kept me in the true faith.”⁶⁹

Luther understood grace as an attitude in God rather than a quality which God infuses into human beings. In an exposition of Psalm 51:10 Luther writes, “Grace is one thing and the gift of grace another. Grace means favor by which God accepts us, forgiving sins and justifying freely through Christ. . . So you should not think it is a quality, as the scholastics dreamed.”⁷⁰ God forgives and justifies the sinner because he is gracious and merciful not because we are worthy. In his grace he offered up his Son as a sacrifice for the sins of the world.

Luther not only taught that salvation is by grace alone but also that it is received by faith alone without any human works or merit. Faith merely receives the promise of forgiveness and salvation. It does not merit anything.⁷¹ For Luther the teaching of justification by faith alone serves to guarantee that justification is by grace alone because justification by faith excludes human works and merit.

Furthermore, “All have sinned,” and “they are now justified without merit by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. . .by his blood” (Rom 3[:23-25]). Now because this must be believed and may not be obtained or grasped otherwise with any work, law, or merit, it is clear and certain that this faith alone justifies us.⁷²

⁶⁵ SA, III, 1, 3.

⁶⁶ LW, 33:98.

⁶⁷ LW, 33:68.

⁶⁸ LW, 33:157.

⁶⁹ SC, 3rd Article, 6.

⁷⁰ LW, 12, 376-377.

⁷¹ LW, 12, 377.

⁷² SA, II, 1, par. 3-4.

Justification is always based on Christ's redemptive work alone. Although sin remains in the Christian, God regards him as completely righteous and holy for Christ's sake through faith.⁷³ Since Christ is the only Redeemer, it follows that salvation is God's work alone. Faith is not a cause of salvation, but the way the sinner receives salvation. Faith gives comfort and certainty that the sinner has a merciful God.⁷⁴ To teach that human beings contribute to their salvation is to diminish Christ's work of redemption. Luther writes, "If we believe that Christ has redeemed men by his blood, we are bound to confess that the whole man was lost; otherwise we should make Christ either superfluous or the redeemer of only the lowest part of man, which would be blasphemy and sacrilege."⁷⁵

Because of his sometimes bombastic style, his love of paradoxes, and his gift for making striking statements, Luther must be read carefully. One scholar warns, "By making a judicious selection of isolated statements it is easy to turn Luther into a follower of either Barth or Butler. Only a wide acquaintance with Luther's writings can guard against both extremes."⁷⁶ This seems to be particularly true in trying to understand Luther's teaching of election.⁷⁷ Luther must also always be read in context. It is important to know the occasion of his writing and the particular opponent he is addressing.

Luther wrote at some length about the doctrine of election in his *Bondage of the Will*.⁷⁸ He wrote this treatise in 1525 in response to Erasmus' *Concerning Free Choice*. Luther praised Erasmus for getting to the nub of the controversy and the heart of the Reformation, for attacking

⁷³ SA, III, 13, par. 1.

⁷⁴ Werner Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, 120-121.

⁷⁵ LW, 33:293.

⁷⁶ Siegbert Becker, *The Foolishness of God*, 50.

⁷⁷ Robert Kolb, *Bound Choice, Election, and Wittenberg Theological Method: From Martin Luther to the Formula of Concord*. (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005). Kolb's study is the best available on the Lutheran doctrine of Election in the Reformation era.

⁷⁸ The Latin title of this work *De servo arbitrio* is better translated "concerning enslaved choice." *The Bondage of the Will*, however, has become the commonly accepted title in English. See the brief introduction to volume 33 of *Luther's Works*, American Edition, by the translator Philip S. Watson, p. xi-xii.

the real issue, the question on which everything else hinges.⁷⁹ The real issue for Luther was whether salvation is by grace alone or whether human beings have a role to play in their own salvation. Do human beings by nature have the power and ability to choose to serve God and believe in him or is salvation, including conversion and election, entirely in the hands of God?

It is important to note that Luther wrote *The Bondage of the Will* in response to Erasmus rather than in response to John Calvin (1509-1564). A cursory reading of the *Bondage of the Will* might lead one to conclude that there is little or no difference between Luther and Calvin on the doctrine of predestination. For instance, Luther writes,

But if God is robbed of the power and wisdom to elect, what will he be but a false idol, chance, at whose nod everything happens at random? And in the end it will come to this, that men are saved and damned without God's knowledge, since he has not determined by his certain election who are to be saved and who damned, but after offering to all men generally the forbearance that tolerates and hardens, then the mercy that corrects and punishes, he has left to them to decide whether they want to be saved or damned, and that in the meantime he has himself, perhaps, gone off to the banquet of the Ethiopians, as Homer says.⁸⁰

It is likewise the part of this incarnate God to weep, wail, and groan over the perdition of the ungodly, when the will of the Divine Majesty purposely abandons and reprobates some to perish. And it is not ours to ask why he does so, but to stand in awe of God who can do and wills to do such things.⁸¹

Nevertheless, there are significant differences between Calvin and Luther on election.⁸² For instance, Luther taught that God's grace is universal. "God is extravagantly rich in his grace: first, through the spoken word, in which the forgiveness of sins is preached to the whole world (which is the proper function of the gospel)."⁸³ Luther taught universal atonement. Christ died for the sins of the whole world. God also wants all men to be saved. For that reason he desires that the gospel be proclaimed throughout the world. In a sermon on the words, "I praise you

⁷⁹ LW, 33:294.

⁸⁰ LW, 33:171.

⁸¹ LW, 33:146.

⁸² See Burnell F. Eckhardt, Jr., "Bondage of the Will: Calvin and Luther." *Logia* 7 (Reformation 1998): 23-30.

⁸³ SA, III, 4. See LC, 2nd petition, 54 for a similar statement, "All this is nothing more than to say: 'Dear Father, we ask you first to give us your Word, so that the gospel may properly be preached throughout the world and then that it may also be received in faith. . .'"

Father. . .because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned” (Mt 11:25), Luther writes,

Such words must not be understood as though there were something lacking in God, as though he did want to grant the knowledge of the gospel to all. For he is a God who wants all men to be saved. Therefore he gives his Son not to this man or that man in particular, but to the whole world (John 3). He sends the preaching of his Son not only to this place or that, not in a corner, but openly to all the world, so that one must see that he would gladly have all men receive it, believe it, and be saved.⁸⁴

Luther not only taught that God wants all men to be saved but that he also has forgiven all people apart from faith, whether they believe it or not. The gospel is God’s message of forgiveness directed to all.

Even he who does not believe that he is free and his sins forgiven shall also learn, in due time, how assuredly his sins were forgiven, even though he did not believe it. . . . He who does not accept what the keys give receives, of course, nothing. But this is not the key’s fault. Many do not believe the gospel, but this does not mean that the gospel is not true or effective. A king gives us a castle. If you do not accept it, then it is not the king’s fault, nor is he guilty of a lie. But you have deceived yourself and the fault is yours. The king certainly gave it.⁸⁵

Luther did not try to harmonize God’s will to save all and his particular predestination of the elect. The answer to that apparent contradiction belongs to the hidden will of God. Human beings are not to inquire into this nor would it do any good for them to try.

It is right to say, God does not desire our death. . . . It is right, I mean, if you speak of God as preached; for he wills all men to be saved [I Tim. 2:4] seeing he comes with the word of salvation to all. . . . But why that majesty of his does not remove or change this defect of our will in all men, since it is not in man’s power to do so, or why he imputes this defect to man, when man cannot help having it, we have no right to inquire; and though you may do a lot of inquiring, you will never find it out.⁸⁶

Luther was content to let this paradox or apparent contradiction stand: if a person is saved it is completely to God’s credit; if a person is lost it is completely that person’s own fault. He did not try to find an explanation that would be satisfactory to human reason and human logic.

Luther also allowed another paradox to stand. Although everything *must* happen according to God’s foreknowledge, God is not responsible for the evil that human beings do.

⁸⁴ WA, 52, 618. Quoted in Becker, *The Foolishness of God*, 136-137.

⁸⁵ LW, 40:366-367.

⁸⁶ LW, 33:140.

Luther explained that God does indeed foreknow perfectly everything that will happen and everything must of necessity happen according to his foreknowledge. For God cannot deceive or be deceived. Nevertheless the wicked act willingly and not under compulsion.⁸⁷ Unbelievers are not compelled to sin against their own will. They do what they want to do.⁸⁸ God is not to be blamed for those who are lost. Luther was once asked whether God's judgment of hardening was to be taken literally or figuratively. Luther replied,

Literally, but not actively, because God doesn't do anything that's bad. Yet his omnipotence does everything, and as he finds man, so he acts on him. Pharaoh was by nature wicked; God acted on him, and Pharaoh continued to be wicked. His heart was hardened because God didn't hinder Pharaoh's ungodly plans by his Spirit and grace. Why God didn't hinder them is not for us to ask.⁸⁹

God's foreknowledge, however, is not the basis of election. In his *Lectures on Romans* Luther points out that there was no difference between Esau and Jacob, yet God chose the one and not the other. "There is no doubt that both of them were evil because of the disease of original sin. . .by their own merit they were the same and equal and belonged to the same mass of perdition."⁹⁰ Predestination is not based on anything within human beings. It is based on God's will and mercy. "The apostle gives no other reason as to why there is not injustice with God than to say: 'I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy' (v. 15), which is the same as saying: 'I will have mercy on whom I wish,' or to him who is predestined to receive mercy."⁹¹ In his *Preface to the Book of Romans* (1522) Luther states that from God's eternal predestination precedes who will believe so that salvation can be taken entirely out of the sinners' hands and left in God's hands alone.⁹²

⁸⁷ LW, 33:185.

⁸⁸ LW, 33:64.

⁸⁹ LW, 54:385.

⁹⁰ LW, 25:386.

⁹¹ LW, 25:386. See also LW, 54:87.

⁹² LW, 35:378.

Luther was not a fatalist. He taught that human beings have free will or freedom of choice in those things that are subject to reason. He warned people that they are to make use of the means through which God gives his blessings.

This example should be carefully noted on account of those who refer everything to predestination and thus do away with all the activities and means God has ordained. For this is what they say: "If these things must happen, they will happen of necessity, even without work on my part." Or if they should expose themselves to needless dangers, they promise themselves protection and defense, since God would do this of necessity in accordance with His promise. These thoughts are wicked and impious, because God wants you to make use of the means you have at your disposal. He wants you to embrace the opportunity presented to you and to use it, since it is through you that He wants to accomplish the things He has ordained. For thus He wanted your father to beget you and your mother to nourish you, although He would have been able to create and nourish you without parents.⁹³

For Luther predestination is always based on God's grace demonstrated in the atoning work of Christ. We receive the benefits of redemption through faith which is created and sustained through the means of grace, the gospel in Word and Sacraments.⁹⁴ Those who are troubled by thoughts of whether they are among the elect or not should not seek the certainty of their salvation by trying to peer into the hidden will of God but are to find their certainty in God's promises of forgiveness for Christ's sake.

Accordingly, you who are listening to me now should remember that I have taught that one should not inquire into the predestination of the hidden God but should be satisfied with what is revealed through the calling and through the ministry of the Word. For then you can be sure about your faith and salvation and say: "I believe in the Son of God, who said (John 3:36): 'he who believes has eternal life.'"⁹⁵

Predestination ultimately pertains only to the elect, not to the damned. A person should not trouble himself about those who are not chosen. Such thoughts can only lead to despair. In his "A Sermon on Preparing to Die," Luther writes, "You must not regard hell and eternal pain in relation to predestination, not in yourself, or in itself, or in those who are damned, nor must you

⁹³ LW, 5:173.

⁹⁴ LW, 5:46-47.

⁹⁵ LW, 5:50.

be worried by the many people in the world who are not chosen. If you are not careful, that picture will quickly upset you and be your downfall.”⁹⁶

Melanchthon's Theology

Next to Luther, Philipp Melanchthon was the most important and influential of the Lutheran reformers. He was the author of the *Augsburg Confession* (1530), usually considered the primary confession of the Lutheran Church. He also wrote the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* (1531) as a defense and explanation of the *Augsburg Confession* in response to the Roman Catholic *Confutation*. The *Apology* also received confessional status in the Lutheran Church. Melanchthon's *Loci Communes* (1521),⁹⁷ based on an outline of St. Paul's letter to the Romans, was the first Lutheran systematic theology. His contributions to the field of education earned him the title *Praeceptor Germaniae*.

In the early years of his association with Luther Melanchthon was in lock step with the Wittenberg Reformer theologically. In the last years of Luther's life Melanchthon began to show some theological independence which resulted in several controversies following Luther's death. Among the doctrines he began to express differently from Luther were the doctrines of election and conversion.

Throughout the *Augsburg Confession* and the *Apology* it is evident that Melanchthon believes that God is the author of the Holy Scriptures. In fact, he often uses the terms Scripture and the Word of God interchangeably.⁹⁸ Melanchthon does not set out to argue that the Holy

⁹⁶ LW, 42:105. WA 2:690 – the word translated “predestination” is *Vorsehung* in the original.

⁹⁷ *The Loci Communes of Philip Melanchthon*, translated by Charles Leander Hill. (Boston: Meador Publishing Co., 1944). Hereafter *Loci Communes* (1521).

⁹⁸ Ap II, 12-13. All references to the *Apology* are to the text published in the *Concordia Triglotta* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921). The citations are by article and paragraph number, hereafter Ap. The Kolb-Wengert edition of the Book of Concord translates the revised “Octavo” text of September 1531. The *Triglotta* uses the longer “Quarto” text of May 1531, also known as the *editio princeps*. The compilers of the *Book of Concord* of 1580 opted for the “Quarto” text even though the “Octavo” text seems to have been in more frequent use before that time. For a discussion of these texts of the *Apology* see Charles Arand, “The Texts of the Apology of the Augsburg Confession,” *Lutheran Quarterly*, vol. XII #4 (Winter 1998) 461-484. There are no real theological differences between the two texts. This writer has

Spirit is the author of the Scriptures. That was not a point of controversy in 1530 or 1531.⁹⁹ He simply assumes the divine authorship of Scripture. For instance, he complains that the authors of the *Confutation*¹⁰⁰ “have condemned several articles contrary to the manifest Scripture of the Holy Ghost.”¹⁰¹ He writes, “Truly it is amazing that the adversaries are in no way moved by so many passages of Scripture, which clearly ascribe justification to faith, and indeed, deny it to works. Do they think that the same is repeated so often for no purpose? Do they think that these words fell inconsiderately from the Holy Ghost?”¹⁰²

Since the Holy Spirit is the author of Scripture, Scripture alone determines doctrine and practice. Melancthon always bases his argument on Scripture. For instance, he claims to have shown that remission of sins for Christ’s sake is received by faith alone “both from testimonies of Scripture, and arguments derived from Scripture.”¹⁰³

Truths established by Scripture are binding by divine right and command. If something cannot be established by Scripture it is not binding on God’s people. Against auricular confession the Apology states, “But in the enumeration of offenses in confession, we have said that it is not necessary by divine right.”¹⁰⁴ In private confession pastors are to pronounce absolution and not investigate secret sins or act as judges handing down sentence. “Therefore

chosen the text of the *Triglotta* because he is more familiar with it and because it was the text included in the *Book of Concord* of 1580.

⁹⁹ Throughout the 16th and into the 17th century the divine inspiration of the Scriptures was assumed rather than argued by Lutheran theologians because the doctrine was accepted by Calvinists and Roman Catholics. “Generally little effort was expended trying to explain the How of inspiration and the That was taken for granted.” See Eugene F. Klug, *From Luther to Chemnitz: On Scripture and the Word*. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971), 154.

¹⁰⁰ The *Confutation* (*Confutatio pontifica* or *Responsio pontifica*) was written by papal theologians and read to the Diet of Augsburg on August 3, 1530, as the official theological response to the *Augsburg Confession*. It was not published until 1559. The evangelical party was not permitted to have a written copy of the *Confutation* unless they promised not to publish it, promised not to reply to it, and promised to accept its conclusions. The evangelical party refused to abide by those conditions. Melancthon received a hand written copy from members of his own party who had taken notes in shorthand. For an English translation of the *Confutation* see *Sources and Contexts of the Book of Concord*. ed. by Robert Kolb and James A. Nestingen (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001) 105-139.

¹⁰¹ Ap, Preface, 9.

¹⁰² Ap IV, 107-108.

¹⁰³ Ap IV, 117.

¹⁰⁴ Ap VI, 5.

ministers in the church have the command to remit sin; they have not the command to investigate secret sins. And indeed, they absolve from those who do not remember; for which reason absolution, which is the voice of the Gospel remitting sins and consoling consciences, does not require judicial examination.”¹⁰⁵ Celibacy is not to be exalted over marriage because marriage is sanctioned by Scripture. “In believers marriage is pure because it has been sanctified by the Word of God, *i.e.*, it is a matter that is permitted and approved by the Word of God as Scripture abundantly testifies.”¹⁰⁶ Without a statement of Scripture, a Christians cannot be sure of God’s will. Christians can have no certainty about the God-pleasing nature of works and services to God prescribed by human beings (e.g., celibacy) without clear testimony of Scripture. “But as these services have no testimony of God’s Word, consciences must be in doubt as to whether they please God.”¹⁰⁷

Scripture constitutes a higher authority than the church. “The consensus of the prophets is assuredly to be judged as the consensus of the Church universal. We concede neither to the pope nor the church the power to make decrees against this consensus of the prophets.”¹⁰⁸ If bishops teach contrary to God’s Word, they are not to be listened to or obeyed.¹⁰⁹

Scripture is also to be preferred to the fathers and is the sole and sufficient source of Christian faith and life. In his *Loci Communes* of 1521 Melanchthon writes,

I would desire nothing quite so much if it were possible, as that all Christians be thoroughly conversant with divine letters alone, and be wholly transformed into their nature. For since the Godhead has expressed its most complete image in them, it cannot from any other source be more surely or correctly known. He is mistaken who seeks the form of Christianity in any other source than Canonical Scripture. For indeed how much do the commentaries lack the purity of Canonical Scripture? In Canonical Scripture, one will find nothing but what is worthy of honor, while in the Commentaries how many things depend on human reason!¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁵ Ap VI, 7-8.

¹⁰⁶ Ap XXIII, 28.

¹⁰⁷ Ap XV, 17.

¹⁰⁸ Ap XII, 66.

¹⁰⁹ Ap XXVIII, 20-21.

¹¹⁰ *Loci Communes* (1521), 64-65.

The word *tradition* is usually used in a negative sense by Melanchthon in the *Augsburg Confession* and *Apology* to refer to human rites and ceremonies which are contrary to Scripture. He objects to them when they are forced on people as necessary services¹¹¹ or instituted to merit grace.¹¹² Although he notes that many traditions are kept cheerfully by the evangelical party and have value for the sake of good order,¹¹³ he draws a sharp distinction between traditions and the things commanded by God.¹¹⁴ Human traditions are not binding. “The Apostles violated traditions and are excused by Christ; for the example was to be shown the Pharisees that these services are unprofitable.”¹¹⁵

Melanchthon frequently cites the fathers in both the *Augsburg Confession* and the *Apology* not as sources of doctrine but to demonstrate that the Lutheran teaching was not an aberration or something new. Melanchthon claimed that the Lutheran teaching was in historic continuity with the apostolic church.¹¹⁶

Melanchthon, however, had a higher view of the value of philosophy than Luther. He was less inclined to be critical of Aristotle and more inclined to make use of him. He recognized Aristotle as an unsurpassed teacher of civil morals and ethics,¹¹⁷ but noted that such civic righteousness should not be “praised with reproach to Christ.”¹¹⁸

Melanchthon taught that original sin consisted not only in a lack of original righteousness but also in an inability to believe or do anything that is God-pleasing. “Since the fall of Adam all human beings who are born in the natural way are conceived and born in sin. This means that they are full of evil lust and inclination and cannot by nature possess true fear of God and true

¹¹¹ Ap XV, 49ff.

¹¹² Ap, XV, 21.

¹¹³ Ap, XV, 20-21, 38ff.

¹¹⁴ Ap, XIII, 3-4.

¹¹⁵ Ap, XV, 36.

¹¹⁶ Augsburg Confession, Conclusion, 4-5.; hereafter AC. Citations of the Augsburg Confessions are by article and paragraph number, Kolb-Wengert translation.

¹¹⁷ Ap, IV, 14.

¹¹⁸ Ap, IV, 24.

faith in God.”¹¹⁹ Although human will is by nature free in regard to those things which are subject to reason, human beings have no power by nature to produce spiritual righteousness.

“This righteousness is worked in the heart when the Holy Spirit is received through the Word.”¹²⁰

For Melanchthon grace is not a quality which God infuses into human beings, but “is the favor, mercy, and gratuitous benevolence of God toward us.”¹²¹ Consequently, human beings are saved by grace alone through faith alone because of Christ’s work of redemption.

Human beings cannot be justified before God by their own powers, merits, or works. But they are justified as a gift on account of Christ through faith when they believe that they are received into grace and that their sins are forgiven on account of Christ, who by his death made satisfaction for our sins. God reckons this faith as righteousness (Rom. 3[:21-26] and 4[:5]).¹²²

Melanchthon defines faith as trust or confidence in the promises of God. “Faith is nothing more than reliance on the divine mercy promised in Christ.”¹²³ A promise can be received only by faith.¹²⁴ To be justified means to be accounted or pronounced righteous.¹²⁵ Faith justifies because it receives the forgiveness of sins.¹²⁶ In fact, Melanchthon equates justification with the forgiveness of sins.¹²⁷ Faith justifies not because it is a good work but because it apprehends what God promises. Thus it can be said that God reckons faith as righteousness to those who believe.¹²⁸ Melanchthon is careful in his use of prepositions to indicate that faith is the means through which we receive forgiveness of sins and are saved. It is not a *cause* of salvation. “We cannot obtain forgiveness of sin and righteousness before God

¹¹⁹ AC, II, 1, German version. The Augsburg Confession was written in both Latin and German. One is not strictly speaking a translation of the other. It seems that Melanchthon sometimes worked on one version and sometimes the other, while at other times he worked on both at once. Because one is not strictly speaking a translation of the other there are some differences between the two versions. The two versions, therefore, serve to supplement or explain each other. Although the German version was the version read at the Diet of Augsburg, both versions were presented to Emperor Charles V and both are considered authoritative.

¹²⁰ AC, XVIII, 1-3.

¹²¹ *Loci Communes* (1521), 171.

¹²² AC IV, Latin version.

¹²³ *Loci Communes* (1521), 177.

¹²⁴ Ap, IV, 84.

¹²⁵ Ap, IV, 72.

¹²⁶ Ap, IV, 72.

¹²⁷ Ap, V, 76.

¹²⁸ Ap, IV, 86.

through our merit, work, or satisfactions, but that we receive forgiveness of sin and become righteous before God out of grace for Christ's sake through faith when we believe that Christ has suffered for us and that for his sake our sin is forgiven and righteousness and eternal life are given to us."¹²⁹

Faith is a gift which the Holy Spirit bestows on the sinner through the proclamation of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. The bestowal of faith is an act of God dependent on his will, rather than on the will of sinful human beings. As Melanchthon writes in the *Augsburg Confession*,

To obtain such faith God instituted the office of preaching, giving the gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit who produces faith, *where and when he wills*, in those who hear the gospel. It teaches that we have a gracious God, not through our merit but through Christ's merit, when we so believe. Condemned are the Anabaptists and others who teach that we obtain the Holy Spirit without the external word of the gospel through our own preparation, thoughts, and works.¹³⁰

As seen above, Melanchthon in the *Augsburg Confession*, *Apology*, and early editions of his *Loci Communes* taught that the will of natural man was enslaved and not free to choose those things pertaining to God. However, in later editions of his *Loci* Melanchthon began to ask the question, "*cur alii, prae aliis?*" (Why are some saved and not others?) He answered the question by finding a cause in human beings themselves for their election and conversion. In 1543 Melanchthon wrote,

Nor does the conversion of David take place like a stone might be turned into a fig. But the free choice did something in David. When he heard the rebuke and promise, he willingly and freely made his confession.¹³¹

Know that God wills in this very manner we are to be converted, when we pray and contend against our rebelliousness and other sinful activities. Therefore some of the ancients put it this way: The free choice in man is the ability to apply oneself toward grace, that is, our free choice hears the promise, tries to assent to it, and rejects the sins

¹²⁹ AC. IV, 1-2. Ap. IV, 1.

¹³⁰ AC, V, 1-4 (German text). The German text states that the Holy Spirit produces faith *wo und wann er will*. The Latin text states that he effects faith *ubi et quando visum est deo*.

¹³¹ Philipp Melanchthon, *Loci Communes* 1543. trans. By J.A.O. Preus (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1992), 43. Hereafter *Loci Communes* (1543).

that are contrary to conscience. Such things do not take place in devils. Therefore we must consider the difference between the devils and the human race. Further, these points become clearer when the promise is considered. Since the promise is universal and since in God there are not conflicting wills, it is necessary that *there is some cause within us* for the difference as to why Saul is rejected and David received, that is, *there must be a different action on the part of the two men*. When these points are rightly understood, they are true and useful in the exercise of faith and true consolation. Since our souls rest in the Son of God who is shown to us in the promise, this will cast light upon the connection of the causes which are the Word of God, the Holy Spirit and *the will of man*.¹³²

This third cause in conversion, namely, the will of man either cooperating with the Holy Spirit or not resisting him, was one of the contributing causes of the synergistic controversy among Lutherans after Luther's death. The doctrine of conversion (whether monergistic or synergistic) became one of the theological issues in the Election Controversy in America.

Formula of Concord (1577)

The *Formula of Concord* of 1577 was written to settle a number of controversies that had arisen in the Lutheran Church in Germany after Luther's death. The primary authors were Jacob Andreae (1528-1589) and Martin Chemnitz (1522-1586).¹³³ Article XI (Election), however, was not written because of any specific controversy among Lutheran theologians. Since "violent" disputes, however, had arisen elsewhere and theologians had not always been consistent in their use of language and terminology in teaching this doctrine, the authors of the *Formula of Concord* decided to include this article. They were hoping to prevent a controversy in the future.¹³⁴

The *Formula of Concord* distinguishes between God's foreknowledge and his eternal predestination. Although God's foreknowledge extends over all, he is not the cause of evil.¹³⁵

¹³² *Loci Communes* (1543), 44. (emphasis mine)

¹³³ The following were also involved in the production of the *Formula of Concord*: David Chytraeus (1531-1600), Christoph Koerner (1518-1594), Andreas Musculus (1514-1581), and Nikolaus Selnecker (1528/30-1592). Koerner and Musculus had a very minor role. For information on the other four see Theodore R. Jungkuntz, *Formulators of the Formula of Concord: Four Architects of Lutheran Unity* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1977).

¹³⁴ *Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration*, XI. 1. The *Formula of Concord* is divided into two parts, namely the Epitome and the Solid Declaration. Both parts treat the same articles. Hereafter, FC, SD, and Ep, article and paragraph number. Citations from the Kolb-Wengert edition.

¹³⁵ FC, Ep, XI, 2-4.

God's foreknowledge does, however, set limits on evil. God's predestination pertains to those who are saved, not to the reprobate, and is a cause of their salvation and everything that belongs to it.¹³⁶ In fact, "salvation rests in the gracious decision of God, which he has revealed in Christ."¹³⁷

There is no double predestination. People should not speculate about predestination and try to pry into the secret counsels of God, but seek certainty in the Word through which Christ calls sinners to himself and through which they receive the Holy Spirit and the gift of salvation.¹³⁸ For "God has maintained silence and has hidden a great deal relating to this mystery, reserving it for his wisdom and knowledge alone."¹³⁹ We cannot and should not try to find a basis for everything in this article.¹⁴⁰ Eternal election should be thought of only in connection with God's gracious gospel promises contained in Word and sacrament.

The Word holds Christ before our eyes as the "Book of Life," which he opens and reveals for us through the preaching of the holy gospel, as it is written, "Those whom he has chosen, he also called" [Rom. 8:30]. In Christ we are to seek the Father's eternal election. He had decreed in his eternal divine counsel that he will save no one apart from those who acknowledge his Son Christ and truly believe in him. . . We have a glorious comfort in this salutary teaching, that we know we have been chosen for eternal life in Christ out of sheer grace, without any merit of our own, and that no one can tear us out of his hand [John 10:28-29]. For he has assured us that he has graciously chosen us not only with mere words. He has corroborated this with an oath and sealed it with the holy sacraments. In the midst of our greatest trials we can remind ourselves of them, comfort ourselves with them, and thereby quench the fiery darts of the devil.¹⁴¹

If anyone wants to speak about election or predestination correctly, he must take into account God's complete plan of salvation as revealed in the Scriptures. The confession declares, "the entire teaching of God's intention, counsel, will, and preordination concerning redemption,

¹³⁶ FC, Ep, XI, 5.

¹³⁷ FC, SD, XI, 90.

¹³⁸ FC, Ep, XI, 6-11.

¹³⁹ FC, SD, XI, 52.

¹⁴⁰ FC, SD, XI, 64. See 57-63.

¹⁴¹ FC, Ep, XI, 13.

justification, and salvation must be taken as a unity.”¹⁴² The *Formula* summarizes God’s will in eight points:

1. That the human race has been truly redeemed and reconciled with God through Christ, who has merited with his innocent obedience, suffering and death both the righteousness that avails before God [Rom. 1:17; 3:21-26; 2 Cor. 5:21] and eternal life.
2. That this merit and the benefits of Christ are to be offered, given, and distributed to us through his Word and sacraments.
3. That God wills to be effective and active in us with his Holy Spirit through the Word, when it is preached, heard, and meditated on, to convert our hearts to true repentance, and to enlighten them in true faith.
4. That he wills to make righteous all those who in true repentance accept Christ by faith, and he wills to receive them into grace as children and heirs of eternal life.
5. That he wills to sanctify in love those whom he has justified, as St. Paul says in Ephesians 1 [:4].
6. That he wills to protect them in their great weakness against the devil, the world, and the flesh, to guide and lead them in his ways, to lift them up when they fall, and to comfort and preserve them in cross and trials.
7. That he wills to strengthen and increase in them the good work that he has begun in them and to preserve them to the end, when they abide in God’s Word, pray diligently, persevere in God’s goodness, and faithfully use the gifts they have received.
8. That he wills, finally, to save and glorify forever in eternal life those whom he has elected, called, and justified.¹⁴³

The *Formula of Concord* does not attempt to find an answer that is satisfying to human logic to the question why some are saved and not others. Its authors are content to say that if someone is eternally condemned the fault lies with the person himself rather than with God’s election and God’s desire to save all.¹⁴⁴

The *Formula* condemns the teaching that God does not want all to be saved or that he does not seriously intend that all people should come to him.¹⁴⁵ It also condemns the teaching that “without regard to their sins—only because of God’s naked decision, intention, and will—some are designated for damnation, so that there is no way that they could be saved.”¹⁴⁶ It rejects

¹⁴² FC, SD, XI, 14.

¹⁴³ FC, SD, XI, 15-22.

¹⁴⁴ FC, Ep, XI, 12.

¹⁴⁵ FC, Ep, XI, 17-18.

¹⁴⁶ FC, Ep, XI, 19.

every teaching that finds a cause of election in the individual himself. For the causes of election are exclusively God's mercy and the merit of Christ.¹⁴⁷

The authors of the *Formula of Concord* are careful to call faith the *means* through which a sinner receives forgiveness of sins and salvation rather than calling faith a *cause* of salvation.

Faith is not meritorious.

Poor, sinful people are justified before God, that is, absolved—pronounced free of all sins and of the judgment of the damnation they deserve and accepted as children and heirs of eternal life—without the least bit of our own merit or worthiness, apart from all preceding, present, or subsequent works. We are justified on the basis of sheer grace, because of the sole merit, the entire obedience, and the bitter suffering and death, and the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ alone, whose obedience is reckoned to us as righteousness.

The Holy Spirit conveys these benefits to us in the promise of the holy gospel. Faith is the only means through which we lay hold of them, apply them to ourselves and appropriate them. Faith itself is a gift of God, through which we acknowledge Christ our redeemer in the Word of the gospel and trust in him. Only because of his obedience does God the Father forgive our sins by grace, regard us as upright and righteous, and give us eternal salvation.¹⁴⁸

Articles I-II of the *Formula of Concord* address the doctrine of original sin and free will.

Following Luther the *Formula* states

On the other hand, we believe, teach, and confess that original sin is not a slight corruption of the human nature, but rather a corruption so deep that there is nothing sound or uncorrupted left in the human body or soul, in its internal or external powers. Instead as the church sings, "Through Adam's fall human nature and our essence are completely corrupted." The damage is so indescribable that it cannot be recognized by our reason but only from God's Word.¹⁴⁹

Melanchthon's synergism is condemned even though the authors are careful not to mention him by name. The *Formula* rejects the teaching that "in human beings, human nature and its essence are not completely corrupted but that people still have something good about them, even in spiritual matters, such as the capability, aptitude, ability, or capacity to initiate or effect something in spiritual matters or to *cooperate* in such actions."¹⁵⁰ Likewise the authors of

¹⁴⁷ FC, Ep, XI, 20.

¹⁴⁸ FC, SD, III, 9-11.

¹⁴⁹ FC, Ep, I, 8-10.

¹⁵⁰ FC, Ep, I, 16.

the *Formula* reject the teaching that “once the Holy Spirit has made a beginning through the preaching of the Word and in it has offered his grace, the human will is able out of its own natural powers to a certain degree, even though small and feeble, to do something, to help and cooperate, to dispose and prepare itself for grace, to accept it, and to believe the gospel.”¹⁵¹

The *Formula of Concord* consciously follows Luther in his *Bondage of the Will* in denying to the natural will of man any ability to cooperate with God in conversion or to do anything spiritually good in God’s eyes before conversion. By teaching a total corruption of the human will and reason since the fall into sin the authors seek to guarantee the Reformation principle that salvation is *sola gratia*.

Adhering to the principle of *sola scriptura*, the *Formula of Concord* pledges allegiance to the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments and declares that “God’s Word alone ought to be and remain the only guiding principle and rule of all teaching and that no person’s writing can be put on a par with it, but that everything must be totally subject to God’s Word.”¹⁵² The Lutheran Confessions are important because they are faithful expositions of biblical truth, but are not placed on the same level as Scripture. For instance, the *Formula of Concord* professes allegiance to the first, unaltered Augsburg Confession, “not because it was written by our theologians but because it was taken from God’s Word and is firmly and solidly grounded in it.”¹⁵³ For these reasons Lutherans refer to the Scriptures as the *norma normans* (the determining standard) of faith and the Lutheran Confessions as the *norma normata* (the standard that has been determined by another). Confessional Lutheran candidates for the ministry have historically pledged themselves to the Lutheran Confessions because (*quia*) they are in agreement with the Holy Scriptures rather than in so far as (*quatenus*) they are in agreement.

¹⁵¹ FC Ep, II, 11.

¹⁵² FC, SD. “Concerning the Binding Summary, Basis, Rule and Guiding Principle,” 3, 9.

¹⁵³ FC, SD. “Concerning the Binding Summary,” 5. The *Formula of Concord* also recognizes the *Apology to the Augsburg Confession*, *Luther’s Small and Large Catechisms*, and the *Smalcald Articles* as “official” confessions of the Lutheran Church. These were gathered in the *Book of Concord* of 1580.

Lutheran Doctrine in the Age of Orthodoxy

The Age of Orthodoxy¹⁵⁴ was a period of consolidation and entrenchment for the Lutheran Church. It was also a time of contrasts. During this period Lutheran hymn writers produced a wealth of hymns and chorales that are beloved and treasured by Lutherans to this day. Lutheran theologians produced sermon books and a great quantity of devotional material to be used at home by the laity. This was also the age of the great Lutheran systematicians who produced mammoth dogmatics works which at times fostered an over-intellectualization of Christianity.

During the Age of Orthodoxy Lutheranism was fighting for its very survival in many of the lands of the Reformation. The Jesuits and the Catholic or Counter Reformation re-won large areas of Europe for Catholicism. Lutheran theologians did battle in print with Roman Catholic apologists like the great Jesuit Robert Bellarmine (1542-1621). Lutherans were also involved in bitter controversies with Reformed theologians as Calvinism began to make inroads into Lutheran territory. The Thirty Years War had a devastating impact on the Lutheran Church in many parts of Germany. The Peace of Augsburg (1555) and the Peace of Westphalia (1648) fostered the principle of *cuius regio, eius religio* (the ruler could determine the religion of his realm). Problems arose when rulers changed religious allegiance. In the last decades of the period Lutheran Orthodoxy struggled with Lutheran Pietism. Reacting to a perceived over-intellectualization of religion Pietism emphasized religious experience and downplayed the importance of doctrine. Among pietists sanctification replaced justification as the chief emphasis in Lutheran preaching and teaching.

¹⁵⁴ This period of Lutheran history has not received the attention it deserves. For a brief overview see Robert G. Clouse, *The Church in the Age of Orthodoxy and the Enlightenment*. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1980); Bengt Haeggglund, *History of Theology*. Trans. by Gene J. Lund (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1968), 299-324; Kurt Aland, *A History of Christianity*. trans. by James L. Schaaf (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), vol. II, 201—265; Otto Heick, *A History of Christian Thought*. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965), vol. I, 468-484; Robert D. Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*. 2 volumes (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1970, 1972).

Some of the Lutheran theologians of this period wrote massive works of systematic theology. They labored to see the logical relationship between the various teachings of Scripture. Luther's concern for purity of doctrine is evident in their work and efforts.¹⁵⁵ In spite of their massive doctrinal tomes, their goal in theology was practical. They were concerned about preaching, the devotional life, pastoral care, and parish administration.¹⁵⁶ Indeed, they considered the work of the theologian to be a *habitus practicus*.

These theologians quote Luther, but quote him sparingly. They do not consider Luther inspired or place his writings on the level of Scripture or even the Lutheran confessions.¹⁵⁷ They follow him "simply because in their judgment he understood how to extract the genuine sense of the Biblical text."¹⁵⁸ There is frequent reference to the Lutheran Confessions when treating those doctrines which the confessions treat. The confessions, however, are always considered a secondary norm. Scripture is the determining norm. The *sola scriptura* principle of the Reformation, therefore, was evident in their approach to theology.

For the theologians of this period Holy Scripture is God's Word, given by inspiration. Scripture is sufficient for Christian faith and life and the judge in every doctrinal controversy. They emphasized the *sensus literalis* by which they meant the original intended meaning of a given passage. They did not look for multiple layers of meaning. They also believed in the efficacy of Scripture as a means of grace because one cannot separate the Scriptures from the working of the Holy Spirit. Since the Bible is God's Word the Holy Spirit is always active when it is read or proclaimed.¹⁵⁹ Nevertheless, these orthodox systematicians also had an appreciation for church history and the fathers. Chemnitz is credited with being "the first to bring the systematic study of church history and the history of doctrine into a book dealing specifically

¹⁵⁵ Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*. vol I, 40.

¹⁵⁶ *The Doctrine of Man in Classical Lutheran Theology*. xx.

¹⁵⁷ FC, SD. "Concerning the Binding Summary." 9-13.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, xviii.

¹⁵⁹ Haegglund, *History of Theology*, 306-308.

with Christian doctrine.”¹⁶⁰ Others followed his lead in the study of the fathers and church history. These theologians were particularly cognizant of the great doctrinal controversies that had occurred throughout the history of the Christian Church.

Although Luther had been opposed to the use of Aristotle in theology, the theologians of the age of orthodoxy began to make use of Aristotelian categories and terminology in the construction of their theological systems. Martin Chemnitz is an exception. He did not make use of Aristotle even though he was a student of Melancthon and followed his method. He also believed there ought to be a limit on distinctions and theological subtleties. Theology ought to remain simple and “unencumbered with scholastic and philosophical terminology.”¹⁶¹ John Gerhard (1582-1637) warned about the dangers of philosophy but then justified his use of Aristotle by saying it was necessary to use philosophy because his adversaries had done so in their polemics. A cautious use of philosophical terminology made it easier to refute their errors. Some wonder whether Gerhard always followed his own cautions about the use of philosophy.¹⁶²

Luther and Chemnitz were generally content to let apparent contradictions and paradoxes in Scripture stand. The theologians of this period were not always willing to do so. Their method of asking questions led to ever more subtle distinctions and definitions as they attempted to harmonize all of the teachings of Scripture. The questions they answered often raised new questions to be addressed.¹⁶³

Aristotle’s emphasis on causality came into common usage among Lutheran theologians. For instance Leonard Hutter (1563-1616) speaks of three causes of justification: “1. The grace of God; 2. The merit of Christ; 3. Faith, which in the promise of the Gospel accepts these divine blessings.”¹⁶⁴ Hutter explains that faith is a cause of justification “because faith alone is that

¹⁶⁰ Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*. vol. I, 92-93.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, vol. I, 95.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, vol. I, 122-131.

¹⁶³ Aland, *A History of Christianity*. vol. II, 225-226.

¹⁶⁴ Leonard Hutter, *Compend of Lutheran Theology*. trans. by H.E. Jacobs and G.F. Spieker (Philadelphia: The Lutheran Bookstore, 1868; The Johann Gerhard Institute, reprint, 1997), 100.

means and *instrument* by which we can appropriate and receive the grace of God, the merit of Christ, and that righteousness found in him which alone can endure God's judgment."¹⁶⁵

Although his explanation of faith as the instrument which receives the grace of God is consistent with the teaching of Luther and the Lutheran Confessions, Hutter's calling faith a *cause* of justification is a departure from earlier terminology and perhaps opened the door for later misunderstanding.

Martin Chemnitz was the primary author of the Solid Declaration of the *Formula of Concord*. His presentation of the doctrine of election in his other works corresponds to what he had written in the *Formula*.¹⁶⁶ He wrote, "For the election of God does not follow our faith and righteousness but precedes it as efficient cause."¹⁶⁷ For Chemnitz the usefulness of this doctrine involved overturning any teaching that undermined salvation by grace alone. He wrote,

This article overturns all opinions by which something is ascribed to the natural powers of our will in spiritual things and actions. For God, before the times of this world, in his eternal counsel, decreed that He Himself wanted to effect and work in us, through His Spirit, all the things that belong to our conversion. And man, without this working of God and left to himself, is, per se and of himself, with all the powers of his natural will in the spiritual things that concern our conversion, nothing but enmity against God. Ro 8:7; Gn 6:5.¹⁶⁸

Younger contemporaries of Chemnitz, however, began to employ terminology and explanations foreign to Chemnitz and the *Formula*. Their intention was to safeguard the doctrine of election against the teaching of strict Calvinism.

A turning point in the development of the Lutheran presentation of predestination seems to have been the Colloquy of Montbeliard in 1586. Theodore Beza (1519-1605), John Calvin's successor, debated key doctrinal differences with Jakob Andreae (1528-1590), one of the chief authors of the Lutheran *Formula of Concord*. Among the doctrines that separated Lutherans from

¹⁶⁵ Hutter, *Compend of Lutheran Theology*. 103-104.

¹⁶⁶ See Martin Chemnitz, *Ministry, Word, and Sacraments: An Enchiridion*. trans. by Luther Poellot (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1981), 85-96. Poellot's translation is based on the German edition of 1593 and the Latin edition of 1603. See also Robert Kolb, "Preaching Justification: Martin Chemnitz's Proclamation of God's Election of Believers." *Concordia Journal*, 28 (January 2002), 23-40.

¹⁶⁷ Chemnitz, *An Enchiridion*. 90.

¹⁶⁸ Chemnitz, *An Enchiridion*. 93.

the Reformed was predestination. Andreae opposed the double predestination and supralapsarianism of Beza as well as his doctrine of limited atonement. He stated that the cause of damnation lay within the damned, not in the will of God who wants all men to be saved. Andreae contended that God's call is always sincere and efficacious and rejected Beza's teaching that God loves some but hates others. God's grace is universal and so is his love. He rejected the teaching that God in his eternal, hidden and secret counsel made an eternal, absolute, immutable decree that the greater part of humankind was to be damned.¹⁶⁹

Following the Colloquy of Montbeliard Samuel Huber (ca. 1547-1624) left the Reformed camp and subscribed to the *Formula of Concord*. In attempting to oppose the Reformed doctrine of limited atonement Huber equated election with the universal atonement and grace of God. Including unbelievers, heretics, and the godless in a far reaching election of grace, he fell into universalism and rejected a particular election. His teaching was opposed by Lutheran theologians throughout Germany.¹⁷⁰

It seems that Lutheran theologians began to give more elaborate definitions and explanations of the doctrine of election to counter the teachings of both Beza and Huber. Following the example of the *Formula of Concord* these theologians wanted to speak of election only in the context of the whole order of salvation. For instance, in their treatment of the doctrine they pointed out that there is no salvation apart from faith in Christ and faith is not possible apart from the means of grace. Hutter states,

But why is this election particular? Because, just as God in his eternal counsel, ordained that the Holy Ghost through the word, should call, enlighten, convert, justify, and bring to eternal salvation all those who embrace Christ in true faith; so also in his eternal counsel, he decreed that he would harden, reject, and give over to eternal damnation, those who, called through his word, reject the call, resist the Holy Ghost (desiring to work in them effectually through the word), and obstinately persevere in their forwardness.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹ Jill Raitt, *The Colloquy of Montbeliard*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) Raitt presents the debate on predestination on pages 147-156.

¹⁷⁰ *Realencyklopaedie fuer protestantische Theologie und Kirche*. Begruendet von J.J. Herzog (Leipzig, 1900) Achter Band, 409-412.

¹⁷¹ Hutter, *Compend of Lutheran Theology*. 117-118.

Note that Hutter virtually equates election with God's will to save believers and to damn unbelievers. In addition, he states that God has elected men *in view of* their future faith, apparently making faith a cause of election rather than a result.

Do you therefore state that God has elected men with respect to foreseen faith? What else should I state, when the Holy Scriptures with such exceeding clearness, declare this truth? The Apostle certainly affirms, Eph. 1:5, that God has predestinated us unto the adoption of children. But now Christ gives the power to become sons of God, not to those who have been born of blood, or of the will of the flesh, or of the will of man, but of God, *i.e.*, according to the interpretation of John, those who believe on his name. John 1:12. . . James 2:5. "Hath not God chosen the poor of this world, *rich in faith?*"¹⁷²

Aegidius Hunnius (1550-1603) seems to have been the first to make use of the expressions "election *intuitu fidei*" and "election *intuitu Christi meriti fide apprehendi*" which came into common use by later theologians. Hunnius was always careful to write that election took place in eternity not *because of* faith, but because of Christ's merits apprehended *by* faith. He also seems to have been the first Lutheran to make a distinction between God's antecedent and consequent will in speaking of election.¹⁷³

The Lutheran theologians called the universal benevolence of God to send his Son to die for the sins of the entire world the *antecedent* will of God. Included in the antecedent will of God is the order of salvation by which he brings sinners to salvation by faith in Jesus worked by the Holy Spirit through the means of grace, the gospel in Word and sacrament. The *consequent* or *subsequent* will of God involves the particular election of believers in eternity.¹⁷⁴ Lutheran theologians were consistent in rejecting the absolute predestination of John Calvin. Calvin had placed election in the antecedent will of God. The Lutherans maintained a belief in the universal atonement, the universal grace of God, and his will to save all humankind while at the same time holding to a particular election of God. Foreseen faith began to be seen as a reason why some are saved and not others.

¹⁷² Hutter, *Compend of Lutheran Theology*. 120.

¹⁷³ Robert D. Preus, "The Doctrine of Election as Taught by the Seventeenth Century Lutheran Dogmaticians," *Quartalschrift: Theological Quarterly*. 55 (October 1958), 248-252.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 230-232.

John Gerhard is usually considered the most important theologian of the Lutheran Church after Luther and Chemnitz. His *Loci Theologici* was published in twenty-four large volumes and is noted for its clarity and precision.¹⁷⁵ In his explanation of election he states unequivocally that the merit of Christ alone is the cause of election and nothing in a man, not good works or the use of free will moved God to elect him. However, he continues

Nevertheless, because the merit of Christ does not have a place in man except through faith, therefore we teach that election was made in view of the merit of Christ being apprehended through faith. Therefore we say that God elected from eternity all those and only those whom he foresaw would believe in Christ the Redeemer by the efficacy of the Holy Spirit through the ministry of the gospel and would remain in faith to final faith.¹⁷⁶

Sinful human beings apart from foreseen faith are outside of Christ. Therefore sinful humans are not elected without foreseen faith. Likewise as Paul says, Eph 1 v 4, God chose us in Christ. So, 2 Thes 2 v 13, he says God chose us in faith because he is not able to elect in Christ except under the consideration of faith apprehending Christ (*nisi sub fidei Christum apprehendentis intuitu*).¹⁷⁷

Other theologians, concerned about the possibility of a synergistic understanding of *intuitu fidei*, issued cautions. Abraham Calov (1612-1686) warned that faith must always be considered passively. He insisted that foreseen faith is not a *cause* of election. A human being is not predestined *because of* faith but *through* faith.¹⁷⁸ John Conrad Dannhauer (1603-1666) tried to avoid the appearance of synergism while calling faith a *cause* of election. He writes, “Not because God decreed that Paul should believe does he believe, but because Paul believed to the end and did not resist the means of salvation has he been elected. No I say that reason is not a cause, properly speaking, certainly not a meritorious cause, but a part of the whole order of predestination.”¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁵ Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*. I: 52-53.

¹⁷⁶ Johann Gerhard, *Loci Theologici* (Jena, 1610, edited by Ed. Preuss, Berlin 1863). locus septimus, caput IX, 161.

¹⁷⁷ Gerhard, *Loci*, Locus Septimus, caput IX, 162.

¹⁷⁸ Abraham Calov, *Theologia Positiva* (Wittenberg, c. 1682) Sectio IV, Caput XIV, Thesis Prima. “Idq; non absolute, sed in Christo, Eph. I, 4, non absq; fide, sine qua nemo Deo placet, Ebr. XI, 6, sed per fidem.”

¹⁷⁹ Preus, “The Doctrine of Election as Taught by the 17th Century Lutheran Dogmaticians,” 246.

John Quenstedt's (1617-1688) dogmatics is generally considered the third greatest Lutheran dogmatics after the works of Chemnitz and Gerhard (John Gerhard was his uncle).¹⁸⁰ Quenstedt also tries to eliminate any thought of human merit in his understanding of election *intuitu fidei* by stating that faith is worked by the power of the Holy Spirit through the gospel.

We express the definition of predestination in this way: Predestination is (1) an action (2) of the divine will by which (3) God (4) before the foundation of the world (5) not according to our works, but out of pure mercy (6) according to his purpose and good pleasure which he purposed in himself (7) in view of the merits of Christ apprehended by faith (8) he ordained to eternal life (9) men (10) who by the power of the Holy Spirit (11) through the preaching of the gospel in Christ (12) would persevere and believe to the end (13) to the praise of his glorious grace.¹⁸¹

Other theologians in the age of orthodoxy were not as careful as Gerhard, Calov, and Quenstedt in trying to exclude any thought of synergism from their teaching of election. John Baier (1647-1695), for example, makes faith a cause of election in a way that could imply that God took human responsibility into his decision to elect. Baier writes, "The moving, external, less principal cause of the decree of election is faith in Christ, and that final."¹⁸² Preus suggests that Baier is not totally free from synergism.¹⁸³

Lutheran theologians in the age of orthodoxy were particularly concerned about distinguishing their doctrine from that of Calvinism. Gerhard devotes nearly half of his presentation of election to a refutation of Calvinism.¹⁸⁴ Nevertheless, the theologians of this period introduced terminology and logical argumentation into their presentation of election that caused confusion and misunderstanding in nineteenth and twentieth century Lutheranism in America.

¹⁸⁰ Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*. vol. I, 62. Preus writes, "Quenstedt's lifework is so big, so complete, so concise and systematic, and so excellent that no later Lutheran ever came close to equaling it."

¹⁸¹ Johann Andreas Quenstedt, *Theologia Didactio-Polemica* (Wittenberg, 1685). Caput II, Thesis IX.

¹⁸² Johann Baier, *Compendium Theologiae Positivae*. (Jena, 1691) Part III, Caput XII, p. 953.

¹⁸³ Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*. 1:56.

¹⁸⁴ Preus, "The Doctrine of Election as Taught by the 17th Century Lutheran Dogmaticians," 257.

Summary

The Election Controversy among Lutherans in America during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries must be seen against the backdrop of the Reformation and Post-Reformation periods. There are certain themes from these periods that help one to understand the intensity of the conflict, the arguments used, and the terminology at issue.

Luther and the Lutheran Confessions stressed the principles of *sola gratia* and *sola fide* in teaching soteriology. Election, conversion, and justification are based on God's grace alone without any human works, effort, or merit. Luther and the Lutheran Confessions taught divine monergism and rejected any hint of synergism. At the same time Luther and the Lutheran Confessions reject absolute predestination. Lutherans reject the idea of an arbitrary choice by God but always condition his election on his grace and Christ's merits. God's grace, Christ's atonement, and God's will to save are universal. God's election is not an arbitrary exercise of his will, but election is always *in Christ*.

Luther and the Lutheran Confessions also stressed the principle of *sola scriptura*. The Bible is the only source for doctrine, faith, and the Christian life. Human reason can be used in a ministerial way in theology, but never in a magisterial way because human reason has been corrupted by sin. Luther was suspicious of the use of philosophy in theology because of the corruption of human reason. The Christian must always take his reason captive to the Word of God. For that reason Luther and the Confessions do not try to harmonize paradoxes and apparent contradictions in Scripture. At the same time there is the assertion that Scripture is self-interpreting and clear. There is a strong emphasis on the importance of pure, biblical doctrine. In fact scriptural doctrine takes precedence over the Christian life because the Christian life flows from doctrine. Every doctrine of Scripture is precious because it is God's doctrine. Christians are expected to make public confession of their faith. Written, public confessions have lasting and binding value because they are a statement of biblical truth.

Philipp Melanchthon's teaching and approach to Scripture and theology are in harmony with Luther in the official editions of the *Augsburg Confession*, the *Apology*, and in the early editions of his *Loci*. Melanchthon, however, was less suspicious of human reason and philosophy than Luther and more inclined to try to harmonize the teachings of Scripture with human logic. In later editions of his *Loci* he tried to answer the question why some are saved and not others (*cur alii, prae aliis?*) by finding a cause in human beings themselves why some are chosen and converted. Melanchthon's teaching of a third cause (beside God's Word and the Holy Spirit) in conversion precipitated the synergistic controversy among Lutherans after Luther's death. Melanchthon's synergism was rejected by the *Formula of Concord*.

The Lutheran theologians of the Age of Orthodoxy introduced Aristotelian terms into Lutheran theology and tried to fit all of the teachings of Scripture into a harmonious system. Their method of raising and answering questions led to ever more elaborate and intricate theological systems. They were often less content than Luther to let paradoxes and apparent contradictions stand. Nevertheless, they considered doctrine to be of utmost importance for the life of the church. Reacting to the increasing influences of Calvinism in Germany and the Scandinavian countries they introduced into their presentation of the doctrine of election terminology that excluded the absolute predestination of Calvin, but was foreign to Luther and the Lutheran Confessions. They began to speak of election *intuitu fidei* or *intuitu Christi meriti fide apprehendi*. Many began to speak of persevering faith in one sense or another as a cause of election rather than a result of election. These expressions opened the door to later misunderstanding.

CHAPTER TWO

THE ELECTION CONTROVERSY AMONG LUTHERANS IN AMERICA IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY, 1879-1900

After the Age of Orthodoxy, Pietism and Rationalism came to dominate Lutheranism in Europe. By the beginning of the nineteenth century Rationalism was supreme in nearly every university and theological department in Germany. Pietism was a reaction to what was perceived as an excessive stress on doctrine and a lack of spiritual life in the state churches of Europe. Lutheran Pietism introduced a decidedly subjective spirit into the Lutheran Church and exalted sanctification above justification. Rationalism introduced various critical approaches to the study of the Bible and undermined the Lutheran emphasis on objective truth.

In the nineteenth century a revived Pietism and resurgent Lutheran confessionalism¹⁸⁵ arose to challenge the dominance of Rationalism in Europe. The revival of confessionalism soon spread to America. As confessional Lutheranism grew in America a number of confessional synods in the Midwest banded together in the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America. During the first decade of the Synodical Conference's existence a controversy over the doctrine of election broke out. The Election Controversy pitted the Missouri Synod, Wisconsin Synod, Minnesota Synod, and most of the Norwegian Synod against the Ohio Synod, Iowa Synod and one third of the Norwegian Synod. It resulted in two synods leaving the Synodical Conference and changed the landscape of Lutheranism in America.¹⁸⁶ The controversy remains unresolved to this day in spite of attempts in the twentieth century to resolve it.

In this chapter we will first set the stage historically to understand the setting in America and the trends in Lutheranism in this country. Then we examine the causes of the controversy and the various theological issues involved in it. We also demonstrate that the issues in the

¹⁸⁵ A *confessional* Lutheran is one who believes that the Lutheran Confessions have a continuing significance for the church of all times and remain normative because they are statements of the changeless truths of Scripture.

¹⁸⁶ See Appendixes A-E for an outline of synodical relations.

controversy resulted from differences in the approach to theology. One side followed Luther and the Lutheran Confessions. The other side insisted on the terminology and theological approach of the dogmaticians of the Age of Orthodoxy.

Confessional Revival in Europe

To understand Lutheranism in nineteenth century America one must trace developments in seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth century Europe. Continental Pietism arose in the seventeenth century and profoundly affected Lutheranism in both Europe and America in the eighteenth century. Pietism stressed subjective experience over doctrine and sanctification over justification. Pietism's downplaying of Christian doctrine helped prepare the way for the dominance of rationalism in the second half of the eighteenth century. Pietism and Rationalism caused confessional Lutheranism to fade into the background.

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, reactions to rationalism and the devastating impact it had on Christianity can be seen in a resurgent Pietism and a resurgent confessional Lutheranism in Europe.

The *Deutsche Christentumsgesellschaft* was founded in Basel in 1780 to unite Christians around the fundamental doctrines of Christianity in opposition to the inroads of Rationalism. The *Deutsche Christentumsgesellschaft* stated this general aim:

Our purpose is that in these days, when the foundations of Christianity are being deliberately undermined, the Christian brethren of all confessions must hold together. We want to transmit the doctrine that since the Apostles' time to this day has been sealed with blood undefiled to our descendants. Our special concern is that we and others not be filled with doubt as to doctrine, so much attacked today, of the divinity of Jesus Christ and of His work of atonement, and that the blessed confession be maintained that if we be in Christ there is no condemnation to us, but that we rather, thru [*sic*]faith, of the fullness of God and Christ may receive grace for grace.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁷ Quoted in J.P. Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*. ed. by Leigh Jordahl (St. Cloud, MN: Sentinel Publishing Co., 1970), 20.

Other Christian societies were also formed throughout Europe in opposition to rationalism. These societies were in contact with each other and did much to revive an interest in historic Christianity.

From these Christian societies flowed mission societies to carry the gospel to foreign lands. In 1815 the Basel Mission Society developed from the *Deutsche Christentumsgesellschaft*. Other mission societies quickly followed.¹⁸⁸ One purpose of the mission societies was to bring the gospel to the heathen. Another purpose was to serve the scattered German immigrants and “to protect the distant brethren and sisters from falling from the faith and to lead the erring upon the way of truth, to supply them with the Word of Life, and to gather them into congregations, in order that to them and their descendants the possession of the treasure of evangelical doctrine might be assured.”¹⁸⁹

Many of these societies sent out pastors and missionaries who were willing to serve both Lutheran and Reformed congregations. Depending on the leadership of the mission houses or societies at any given time candidates for the ministry may have had a greater or lesser confessional Lutheran training. Other societies like Louis Harms’ (1808-1865) Hermannsburg Mission Society and Wilhelm Loehe’s (1808-1872) in Neuendetelsau trained strictly confessional Lutherans. Harms sent men to both Africa and America. Loehe sent numerous pastors and candidates for the ministry as well as whole colonies of immigrants to the United States.

Other developments in Germany gave an impetus to confessional Lutheranism. Prussia was predominantly Lutheran from the time of the Reformation. In 1613 Elector John Sigismund (1572-1619) converted to Calvinism. In 1617 he issued his *Confessio Sigismundi* in an attempt to unite the Lutherans and Reformed in his realm. Although the confession rejected Calvin’s double predestination and used definitions of the sacraments as close to Lutheranism as possible,

¹⁸⁸ Kurt Aland, *A History of Christianity*, trans. by James L. Schaaf (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), vol. II, 352-353.

¹⁸⁹ Quoted in *Continuing in His Word: The History of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States*, Max Lehninger, ed. (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1951), 12.

Lutheran pastors and theologians quickly warned about the Calvinism that the document contained. The two groups, therefore, did not unite.¹⁹⁰

Although there were some attempts to modify the differences between Lutheranism and Calvinism (particularly in the externals of worship) in the years following the death of John Sigismund, little was accomplished in overcoming the division. Frederick II “the Great” (1712-1786, ruled 1740-1786) was a Deist and showed little interest in the religious differences of the two groups. Frederick’s great nephew, Frederick Wilhelm III (1770-1840; ruled 1797-1840), however, was a devout Calvinist and was quite concerned about the division between Lutherans and Calvinists in his realm. He ruled like a seventeenth century despot and was willing to use the force of government to bring about a union. He began his efforts to force a union of the Lutherans and Reformed in Prussia in 1817. On the 300th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation he announced the union of the Lutherans and Reformed into one congregation at his court and appealed for the voluntary union of Lutherans and Reformed throughout Prussia and elsewhere in Germany. By 1821 candidates for the ministry were required to pledge loyalty to the union at their examination. In 1823 Frederick Wilhelm required pastors to pledge to the confessional writings of the United Evangelical church in so far as these confessions were in harmony. In 1830 the Prussian government decreed that “Evangelical” was to substituted for the names “Lutheran” and “Reformed.” The Union Agenda or service book was prescribed in 1834.¹⁹¹ This forced union became known as the Prussian Union and soon was adopted in principle in other areas of Germany.

Some Lutherans in Prussia and neighboring lands began to oppose the Union because it compromised distinctive Lutheran doctrine. In honor of the 300th anniversary of the Reformation in 1817 Claus Harms (1778-1855) issued a new edition of Luther’s *Ninety-five Theses* and included ninety-five theses of his own. His theses championed confessional Lutheranism in

¹⁹⁰ Martin O. Westerhaus. “The Confessional Lutheran Emigrations from Prussia and Saxony around 1839.” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, 86 (Fall 1989), 249.

¹⁹¹ *Lutheran Cyclopedia*. ed. by Erwin L. Lueker (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1975), 644.

opposition to rationalism, the religious theories of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), and the proposed Prussian Union.¹⁹² Even though Harms was writing from outside of Prussia in Schleswig-Holstein his theses had a profound effect in Prussia and throughout Germany.¹⁹³ Soon groups of “Old” Lutherans (the label given to those who refused to go along with the Prussian Union) began to form. Noteworthy leaders included Johann Scheibel (1783-1843), John Grabau (1804-1879), and Martin Stephan (1777-1846). Stephan and Grabau led emigrations of “Old” Lutherans to America.¹⁹⁴

Confessional Lutheranism in America

Lutheranism in America in 1800 was influenced by Rationalism. Lutherans paid little or no attention to the Lutheran Confessions with the exception of Luther’s *Small Catechism*. The Second Awakening began to crystallize opposition to rationalism and Deism as revivalism swept America. The revivals crossed denominational lines and began to break down denominational distinctions and foster unionism.¹⁹⁵ The combination of rationalism, unionism, and revivalism brought Lutheran consciousness to an all time low.¹⁹⁶

Some attempts were made to preserve the name *Lutheran* in America. The General Synod, a federation of Lutheran synods, was such an attempt. Founded in 1820, it was the first federation of Lutheran synods in America and eventually united most of the synods in the Eastern United States. Samuel Simon Schmucker (1799-1873), later professor at Gettysburg Seminary, was one of the prime movers in founding this organization. Among the accomplishments of the

¹⁹² An English translation of Harms’ theses can be found in the *Lutheran Cyclopedia*. ed. by Henry Eyster Jacobs and John A.W. Haas (Charles Scribners’ Sons, 1899).

¹⁹³ Aland, *A History of Christianity*, vol. II, 335.

¹⁹⁴ For an overview of the reaction to the Prussia Union in Germany and the subsequent “Old” Lutheran emigrations see the entire article by Westerhaus, “The Confessional Lutheran Emigrations from Prussia and Saxony around 1839.” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, 86, 247-264; 87, 38-60; 123-163; 192-208; 87, 283-293; 88, 34-63. See also Walter O. Forster, *Zion on the Mississippi: The Settlement of the Saxon Lutherans in Missouri, 1839-1841*. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953).

¹⁹⁵ Unionism is the term used to described various levels of cooperation (including worship, mission work, and organization) between religious groups whose public doctrine and confession differ.

¹⁹⁶ *The Lutherans in North America*. ed. by E. Clifford Nelson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 95.

General Synod was the establishment of a seminary in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, in 1826.

Schmucker was also instrumental in the development of this school. Until Gettysburg Seminary was established Lutherans in America were dependent on Europe for pastors. Busy parish pastors also took promising young men under their wings and trained them privately. A lack of a steady supply of well-trained pastors plagued Lutheranism in America from the earliest colonial times until well into the nineteenth century.¹⁹⁷

Most members of the General Synod were not confessional Lutherans. The General Synod was founded about the same time as the Prussian Union was being inaugurated in Germany and it shared the confessional ambiguity of the Union. There is no mention of any of the Lutheran Confessions (not even the *Augsburg Confession*) in the original constitution.¹⁹⁸

Some Lutherans in America were deeply affected by the Second Awakening and adopted the methods of revivalism. They believed that the only way Lutheranism could survive in America was to discard some of the distinctive doctrines and practices of the Lutheran Church and become more like the Protestant denominations that seemed to be thriving in this country. Some of these “American Lutherans” even issued a *Recension of the Augsburg Confession* in a document authored by Schmucker in 1855 called the *Definite Synodical Platform*. The *Recension* removed from the *Augustana* the distinctive Lutheran doctrines that separated Lutherans from the generic sort of Protestantism that had developed in America.¹⁹⁹ Nearly every Lutheran synod in

¹⁹⁷ *The Lutherans in North America*. 116-129.

¹⁹⁸ J.L. Neve and Willard D. Allbeck. *A History of Lutheranism in America*. John W. Drickamer and C. George Fry, ed. (Ft. Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary, 1979), 53. This volume is an updated edition of the third revised edition of *The History of Lutheranism in America* by Neve and Allbeck.

¹⁹⁹ For an overview of the “American” Lutheran controversy see David A. Gustafson, *Lutherans in Crisis: The Question of Identity in the America Republic*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993). The five “errors” eliminated from the Augsburg Confession by the American Lutherans were (1) the approval of the ceremonies of the mass, (2) private confession and absolution, (3) denial of the divine obligation of the Sabbath, (4) baptismal regeneration, and (5) the real presence of the body and blood of our Savior in the Lord’s Supper. For the complete text of the Definite Synodical Platform see Richard C. Wolf, *Documents of Lutheran Unity in America* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 100-104.

the United States rejected the *Definite Synodical Platform*.²⁰⁰ Confessional Lutherans were horrified. The young Wisconsin Synod, though not known for its confessionalism at the time, also rejected the *Definite Synodical Platform* at its 1856 convention. The synod declared that “the adoption of the Platform was nothing else but a definite suicide of the Lutheran Church.”²⁰¹

By the third decade of the nineteenth century the revival of confessional Lutheranism in Germany began to have an influence in America. Among the early leaders of this confessional movement were Paul Henkel (1754-1825) and his sons. The Henkel family supplied many pastors to the Lutheran Church in America and established the Henkel Press which produced the first English translation of the *Book of Concord* in America in 1851.²⁰²

Some of the “Old” Lutherans in Germany, longing for religious freedom, emigrated to America. John Grabau and his followers sailed from Prussia and settled in the area around Buffalo, New York, and Milwaukee, Wisconsin. They founded the Buffalo Synod²⁰³ in 1845. Followers of Martin Stephan left Saxony and settled in Perry County and St. Louis, Missouri. Wilhelm Loehe sent whole colonies from Franconia to Michigan. He hoped that the Native Americans in Michigan would be so impressed by the Christian lives of these colonists that they would desire to become Christians.²⁰⁴ The Saxons in Missouri and the Franconians in Michigan founded the Missouri Synod in 1847. Some of Loehe’s men refused to join the Missouri Synod because of differences on the doctrine of the church and ministry. These Loehe emissaries moved to Iowa and founded the Iowa Synod in 1854. Iowa and Missouri also came to differ on “open questions,” confessional subscription, and their approach to the Lutheran Confessions.²⁰⁵

²⁰⁰ Only three small synods adopted the *Definite Platform*, the East Ohio Synod (founded 1830), the Wittenberg synod (1847), and the Olive Branch Synod (1848). See *The Lutherans in North America*, 224.

²⁰¹ An English translation of the minutes of the 1856 convention can be found in the *WELS Historical Institute Journal*, vol. 11, #1 (April 1993), 3-6.

²⁰² For more information on the Henkel family see Socrates Henkel, *History of the Evangelical Lutheran Tennessee Synod* (New Market, Virginia: 1890).

²⁰³ The synod was officially named “The Synod of the Lutheran Church Emigrated from Prussia.”

²⁰⁴ Herman F. Zehnder. *Teach My People the Truth: The Story of Frankenmuth, Michigan* (Frankenmuth: Herman F. Zehnder, 1970), 11-150.

²⁰⁵ Nelson, *The Lutherans in North America*, 228.

Confessional Lutherans from Norway founded the Norwegian Synod in 1853 and soon entered into fraternal relations with the Missouri Synod.

Other Lutheran Synods were founded in the upper Midwest by pastors sent out from various European mission societies and mission houses. For example the Wisconsin Synod was organized in 1850 as a “New” Lutheran Synod.²⁰⁶ During the first two decades of its existence the Wisconsin Synod developed a greater appreciation for the Lutheran Confessions and gradually moved closer to the “Old” Lutheranism of the Missouri Synod.

The *Definite Synodical Platform* caused many Lutherans in America to reexamine their Lutheran heritage and attitude toward the Lutheran Confessions. C.F.W. Walther (1811-1887) of the Missouri Synod provided confessional leadership through the periodicals *Der Lutheraner* (founded 1844) and *Lehre und Wehre* (1855). In the forward to *Lehre und Wehre* (January 1856) Walther issued an invitation to all who called themselves Lutheran and subscribed without reservation to the *Unaltered Augsburg Confession* to hold “Free Conferences.”²⁰⁷ Four conferences were held between 1856 and 1859. Members of the Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, Missouri, Tennessee, Pittsburgh, and Norwegian Synods attended at least some of the conferences. Men from the Wisconsin Synod expressed interest, but were not able to attend. The *Augsburg Confession* was the subject under discussion and the participants demonstrated a fair degree of unanimity.

²⁰⁶ The name “Old Lutheran” was originally applied to Lutherans who refused to join the Prussian Union. In America the name was given to confessional Lutherans who had migrated to this country from Prussia and Saxony. The name eventually referred to those who took the Lutheran Confessions seriously and who had a strict understanding of the scriptural principles of church fellowship. “New Lutheran” was the name given to those who were willing to go along with the Prussia Union in Europe while striving to remain Lutheran. In America “New” Lutherans were willing to serve German Reformed congregations. Although they subscribed to the Lutheran confessions, they were sometimes inclined to view those confessions as “paper fences” which kept Lutherans from joint endeavors with the Reformed and interfered with mission work.

²⁰⁷ A free conference is an open forum for discussion of doctrinal and practical issues. The conference is free in the sense that none of those who attend appear as an official delegate or representative of any synod. Discussions at the Free Conferences of the 1850s were intended to see first of all whether there was unity among Lutherans in America and secondly, to work toward such unity of understanding and doctrine.

As more confessional Lutherans came to America during the great period of German immigrations, the Pennsylvania Ministerium (founded 1748), the New York Ministerium (1786), the Ohio Synod (1818), the Wisconsin Synod (1850), Michigan Synod (1860), and Minnesota Synod (1860)²⁰⁸ grew more and more confessional. This trend led to the founding of two new federations of synods.

When the Pennsylvania Ministerium withdrew from the General Synod in 1866 because of the General Synod's lack of confessionalism, the stage was set for the founding of a new federation of more confessionally-minded Lutheran synods. Pennsylvania issued an invitation to all Lutheran synods in the United States and Canada which accepted the *Augsburg Confession* to meet to discuss the possibility of forming a truly Lutheran organization. Thirteen synods responded favorably, including the Wisconsin, Michigan, and Minnesota Synods. At the preliminary meeting in Reading, Pennsylvania, December 12-14, 1866, the eminent confessional theologian, Charles Porterfield Krauth (1823-1883), delivered an essay in which he emphasized subscription not only to the *Unaltered Augsburg Confession*, but also to all of the Lutheran Confessions contained in the *Book of Concord*. The delegates established a committee to prepare a constitution and elected officers. Three synods, Ohio, Iowa, and Missouri, were unwilling to join because they believed that complete theological agreement had not yet been established among all of the participants.²⁰⁹

The General Council held its first regular convention in Fort Wayne, Indiana, November 20-26, 1867. The Ohio Synod sent delegates who were granted the right to debate. They did not have right to vote, however, because Ohio had not joined the Council. Ohio's delegates asked for clarification of the Council's theological position on four points: altar fellowship, pulpit fellowship, chiliasm, and secret societies. No doubt, Ohio was

²⁰⁸ The Wisconsin, Michigan, and Minnesota Synods banded together in 1892 to form a federation known as the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan, and Other States. A final amalgamation of the three synods into one took place in 1917. By that time the Nebraska Synod had also joined the Wisconsin Synod.

²⁰⁹ Nelson, *The Lutherans in North America*, 230-237.

concerned about chiliasm because a prominent member of the delegation of the Pennsylvania Ministerium, Joseph Seiss (1823-1904), was a well-known millennialist.²¹⁰ Lodge membership was an issue in many conservative church bodies of the day. Fellowship, whether altar or pulpit, was a key doctrine for all who wanted to be known as confessional Lutherans.

The answers of the General Council to the “four points” at the Pittsburgh convention in 1868 were less than satisfactory to some of the synods. President John Bading (1824-1913) of Wisconsin, President Stephen Klingmann (1833-1891) of Michigan, and President Reinhold Adelberg (1835-1911) of the New York Ministerium attempted to strengthen the statement adopted by the majority of the delegates.²¹¹ Prior to the General Council convention in 1868 the Wisconsin Synod had resolved to break with the Council if suitable answers to the “Four Points” were not forthcoming. When Bading reported to the 1869 Wisconsin Synod convention the answers given to the “Four Points” by the General Council in 1868, Wisconsin officially withdrew from membership. The Minnesota and Illinois Synods withdrew from the Council in 1871. The Michigan Synod withdrew in 1888.²¹²

Walther and the Missouri Synod had been critical of the Wisconsin Synod’s ties to the unionistic European mission societies and the synod’s lax practice on the congregational level. In addition there were problems between Wisconsin Synod and Missouri Synod congregations, particularly in the Watertown area. Missouri’s periodicals, *Der Lutheraner* and *Lehre und Wehre*

²¹⁰ For information on the life and work of Joseph Seiss see his autobiography, *Notes on My Life*, transcribed by Henry E. Horn and William M. Horn (Huntington, Pennsylvania: Church Management Service, Inc., 1982).

²¹¹ *General Council of the Evangelical. Lutheran Church in America, 2nd Convention*. Pittsburgh, Penn. Nov. 12-18, 1868. Pittsburgh: Bakewell & Marthens, 25. In 1869 Adelberg accepted a call to the Wisconsin Synod’s Northwestern University in Watertown and later served as an English professor at the synod’s Wauwatosa seminary.

²¹² Edward Fredrich. *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1992), 40-45.

did not hesitate to point out and criticize Wisconsin's failings. As time went on there was less and less justification for these criticisms.²¹³

In 1867 the Wisconsin Synod adopted resolutions condemning all doctrinal unionism and declaring alignment with those in Europe who wanted to see the forced union between Lutherans and the Reformed annulled. The resolutions, however, attempted to justify receiving money and men from the unionistic mission societies. It was noted that there were still confessional Lutherans within the state churches who protested against the union that the government had imposed on them. So long as these groups remained confessional and protested against the union, it was possible to accept their aid with thanks. The mission societies were the agencies through which such help from these confessional Lutherans came to the synod.

The mission societies reacted sharply to Wisconsin's resolutions. For some time they had been concerned about the theological direction of the synod. They saw the new resolutions as a slap in their face. They accused the Wisconsin Synod of ingratitude and casting aside former friends for the sake of new friends (a veiled reference to the Missouri Synod).²¹⁴

The Wisconsin Synod convention in Racine in 1868 marked an important turning point in the history of the synod. In his president's report Bading stated that the time for a break with the unionistic mission societies had come. The synod's prior vacillation between its love for confessional Lutheranism and its gratitude toward the societies for all of the help they had given made it difficult for anyone to understand the position of the synod. Following Bading's lead the synod broke with the societies while expressing thanks for all the help given by them to the synod up until that time. At the Racine convention Wisconsin also took a stand on the "Four Points" under discussion in the General Council. The convention resolved to break with the Council if satisfactory answers on the "Four Points" were not given. When suitable answers were not forthcoming, the 1869 convention broke with the General Council according to the provisions of

²¹³ Armin Schuetze, *The Synodical Conference: Ecumenical Endeavor* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2000), 38-40.

²¹⁴ Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 112-114.

the 1868 resolution as previously noted. Finally, the Racine convention directed President Bading to initiate discussions with the Missouri Synod not only to address problems between the parishes of the two synods, but also in the hope of establishing brotherly relations. Wisconsin saw no “church divisive differences” between the two synods.²¹⁵

Discussions with Missouri proceeded rapidly and with great success.²¹⁶ After the convention’s close Bading traveled to Milwaukee to present the resolutions to Missouri’s Northern District which was then meeting in convention. Walther was present and suggested that the committee to be appointed by the Northern District should represent the whole Missouri Synod. The meeting between Wisconsin and Missouri took place on October 21-22, 1868, in Milwaukee. The two sides discussed all of the doctrinal questions at issue among Lutherans of that day. The discussion demonstrated complete doctrinal unity to the joy of all the participants. Walther, who had been a sharp critic of Wisconsin, showed himself to be a man of Christian humility and integrity by writing in the November 1 edition of *Der Lutheraner*, “All of our reservations about the dear Wisconsin Synod have not only faded but have been put to shame. God be thanked for his inexpressible gift!”²¹⁷ Koehler reports that Walther closed the meeting with Wisconsin with this declaration, “Brethren, if we had known before what we know now we might have declared our unity of faith ten years ago.”²¹⁸

In May 1869 the two synods worked out a reciprocal worker training agreement. Wisconsin was to close her seminary and transfer her students to Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, and supply a professor. Missouri’s students in Wisconsin would attend Northwestern in Watertown and Missouri would supply a professor to that institution.²¹⁹ Later that year both synods in convention ratified the agreement and the mutual recognition of orthodoxy. For various reasons the Wisconsin Synod was not able to supply a professor for St. Louis. The

²¹⁵ Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, 51.

²¹⁶ Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 41.

²¹⁷ *Der Lutheraner*, Nov.1, 1868, 37.

²¹⁸ Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 74.

²¹⁹ Schuetze, *The Synodical Conference*, 41-42.

Missouri Synod's Frederick Stellhorn (1841-1919) served at the Wisconsin Synod's Northwestern College from 1869 to 1874.

Wisconsin's fellowship with Missouri was part of a growing confessional movement among Midwestern Lutherans. The Norwegian Synod, founded in 1853, had been in fellowship with the Missouri Synod and had a working arrangement for the training of Norwegian Synod students at Missouri's St. Louis Seminary since 1857. The Ohio Synod, founded in 1818, had grown more confessional through the immigration of German Lutherans who were pouring into the region and the efforts of men like Wilhelm Lehmann (1820-1880) and Christian Spielmann.²²⁰ Matthias Loy (1828-1915), a younger contemporary of Lehmann and Spielmann, was particularly sympathetic to the Missouri Synod's doctrinal position.²²¹ Representatives of Ohio and Missouri met in colloquy in 1869 and found that they were in complete doctrinal agreement. The Illinois Synod sought closer ties with the Missouri Synod between 1868 and 1870. Fellowship was declared in 1872. Minnesota's withdrawal from the General Council in 1871 led to fellowship with Wisconsin. Missouri representatives recognized unity of faith at a meeting with Minnesota representatives in January 1872 which led to a declaration of fellowship later that same year.

The stage was set for the founding of a new organization of confessional Lutherans. In June 1870 the Eastern District of the Ohio Synod in convention urged the Ohio Synod to take steps toward establishing cooperative activities with the Missouri Synod, particularly in educational institutions. That October Ohio's President Matthias Loy recommended to his synod "that steps be taken towards effecting a proper understanding between the Synods of Missouri, of Wisconsin, of Illinois, and our own Synod, which all occupy substantially the same position, and arranging a plan of cooperation in the work of the Lord."²²² The convention appointed a

²²⁰ Matthias Loy reports that these two men were "more pronounced in their Lutheranism than was usual in the Ohio Synod." Lehman and Spielmann both served at the Ohio Synod seminary in Columbus, Ohio. See Matthias Loy, *The Story of My Life*, (Columbus: Lutheran Book Concern, 1905), 85.

²²¹ Loy, *The Story of My Life*. 211ff. Loy writes that he and Spielmann "leaned toward Missouriism" more than Lehmann. In fact, Loy was a friendly opponent of Lehmann, his former teacher, on many points.

²²² *Documents of Lutheran Unity in America*. 186.

committee to approach the officers of the other synods and the Norwegian Synod to ask whether such joint work might be undertaken.

A preliminary meeting was held January 11-13, 1871, at a Missouri Synod church in Chicago. Representatives from the Missouri, Ohio, Wisconsin, and Norwegian synods attended. The president of the Illinois Synod²²³ was present but did not actively participate because his synod was still a member of the General Council. Meeting in six three-hour sessions the representatives drafted a constitution for consideration and adoption by their respective synods. They also considered a proposal to provide a single seminary for the various synods by moving Ohio's Columbus seminary to St. Louis as the Wisconsin Synod had recently done with its seminary program. Ohio was to move its college to Pittsburgh with Missouri's support and participation. The delegates scheduled a second preliminary meeting for November 14-16 and extended invitations to all pastors and teachers of the participating synods to attend.

When the November meeting convened at Pastor Wilhelm Sihler's (1801-1885) St. Paul's Church in Fort Wayne, representatives of the Minnesota and Illinois synods were also present. Both of these synods had recently left the General Council for confessional reasons. The proposed constitution with a few minor changes was to be presented to the constituent synods for approval as the basis for the formation of the Synodical Conference.

Professor Friedrich Schmidt (1837-1928) of the Norwegian Synod presented a paper entitled, "Memorandum containing a Detailed Explanation of the Reasons Why the Synods that are Uniting into the Synodical Conference of the Ev. Lutheran Church Are Unable to Join One of the Already Existing so-called Associations of Synods in Our Country."²²⁴ The paper stated that the General Synod is Lutheran in name, but is completely devoid of the character of true

²²³ The Illinois Synod was formed in 1846 when the Synod of the West divided. In 1848 Illinois joined the General Synod. In 1867 Illinois left the General Synod to join the General Council. In May 1880 the Illinois Synod merged with the Illinois District of the Missouri Synod.

²²⁴ This was published under the title *Denkschrift enthaltend eine egehende Darlegung der Gruende, weshalb die zur Synodal-Conferenz der evangel.-luther. Kirche von Nord-America* (Columbus, Ohio, 1871). The publication also included a brief history of events leading up to the 1871 meeting and the proposed constitution.

Lutheranism. The General Synod holds tenaciously to the Lutheran name but in reality is completely devoid of the essence and character that corresponds to that name. Schmidt noted that the United Synod, South, (founded in 1863 by six southern synods which left the General Synod during the Civil War) made an attempt to be more confessional than the General Synod, but had no interest whatsoever in the “exclusive Lutheranism of the Formula of Concord” or of the so-called “Old Lutherans.” The General Council had a staunch, confessional leader in the person of Charles Porterfield Krauth and the Council’s constitution committed itself without reservation to all of the Lutheran Confession. Nevertheless, the Council had failed to take a decisive stand on the “Four Points.” Schmidt argued that there was a need for a new Lutheran organization, one that would be decidedly confessional in theory and in practice.

Conspicuous by its absence in the discussions leading to the founding of the Synodical Conference was the Iowa Synod. Long-standing animosities between Iowa and Missouri precluded Iowa’s participation. As noted previously, the founders of the Iowa Synod had separated from the Missouri Synod over the doctrine of the church and ministry. Iowa also espoused an *historical* approach to the Lutheran Confessions. In the course of time Iowa’s spokesmen contended that the only normative doctrinal statements in the confessions were those dealing with the doctrines which were in dispute at the time of the writing of those confessions. Other doctrinal statements were open to further development and refinement. Iowa claimed that there were doctrines of Scripture that were *open questions*. According to Iowa Lutherans did not need to agree on these doctrines in order to join in expressions of church fellowship.²²⁵ The founding members of the Synodical Conference strongly disagreed with Iowa’s stand. Iowa’s approach to the Lutheran Confessions and *open questions* would play a part periodically in the various stages of the election controversy.

²²⁵ Charles P. Arand, *Testing the Boundaries: Windows to Lutheran Identity*. (St. Louis; Concordia Publishing House, 1995), 119-149.

The First Convention of the Synodical Conference was held at the church of Wisconsin's President John Bading, July 10-16, 1872. One hundred thirty-six pastors, professors, teachers, and laymen assembled. Sixty of these were voting delegates chosen by the individual synods according to the provisions of the proposed constitution. Walther delivered the sermon at the opening service. He preached on 1 Timothy 4:16 using the theme, "How Important It Is That We Above All Make the Saving Of Souls the Purpose Of Our Joint Work in the Kingdom of Christ." Walther was also elected the first president.²²⁶

The delegates heard two essays. Matthias Loy of the Ohio Synod presented, "What is our Task toward the English-speaking People of Our country?" Loy reminded his hearers of their mission responsibilities as confessional Lutherans.²²⁷

Friedrich Schmidt presented his "Theses on Justification."²²⁸ The essay involved a lengthy exposition of the cardinal teaching of Scripture on the basis of twelve theses. Among the

²²⁶ Besides Walther Professor Lehmann of Ohio was elected vice-president, Pastor P. Beyer of Missouri was elected secretary, and Mr. Joh. Schmidt, a layman from Ohio was elected treasurer. *Synodical Conference Proceedings, 1872*, p. 13. The following served as president of the Synodical Conference during its ninety-four year history: C. F.W. Walther (Missouri) served 1872-1873; W.F. Lehmann (Ohio) 1873-1876; H.A. Preus (Norwegian) 1876-1877; W.F. Lehmann (Ohio) 1877-1880; P. Larsen (Norwegian) 1880-1882; J. Bading (Wisconsin) 1882-1912; C. Gausewitz (Wisconsin) 1912-1927; L. Fuerbringer (Missouri) 1927-1944; E. Benjamin Schlueter (Wisconsin) 1944-1950; G. Chr. Barth (Missouri) 1950-1952; W. Baepler (Missouri) 1952-1956; J.S. Bradac (Slovak) 1956-1960; John Daniel (Slovak) 1960-1966.

²²⁷ *Synodical Conference Proceedings, 1872*. 14-20

²²⁸ *Ibid*, 1872. p. 20-58. Schmidt's nine theses are printed below.

Thesis 1 – The doctrine of justification is the most eminent principal article of the Christian faith, a correct understanding and public proclamation of which are of incomparable importance and an unqualified necessity for the salvation of individuals and the welfare of the Church in everything.

Thesis 2 – The Reformation of the Church by Dr. Luther had its starting point by the grace of God in a renewed understanding of the pure evangelical teaching of justification and in the corresponding unadulterated proclamation of this chief article of the faith.

Thesis 3 – In connection with the pure teaching of justification as our Lutheran Church again presents it from the Word of God and has taken its stand on this shining light, treats it above all around three points: (1) the doctrine of the universal and complete redemption of the world through Christ; (2) the doctrine of the power and efficacy of the means of grace; and (3) the doctrine of faith.

problems that were troubling American Lutheranism and would continue to cause trouble well into the future was the question of the universal aspect of justification. Schmidt addressed the relationship of universal justification and the individual's appropriation of justification in several of his theses. The essay was timely because of a dispute between the Norwegian Synod and the Augustana and Iowa synods.²²⁹ Schmidt and Gottfried Fritschel of the Iowa Synod disagreed sharply over this teaching,²³⁰ although later on would be on the same side during the Election Controversy. Their exchanges over justification in the 1870s, however, made it difficult for them to acknowledge each other in the later controversy.

In Lutheran theology justification is equated with the forgiveness of sins. When Jesus died and rose again, God declared the whole world justified or forgiven. The proclamation of the gospel is the proclamation of God's forgiveness. That proclamation has the power to lead people

Thesis 4 – As in Adam all men have fallen and come under the wrath of God and eternal damnation as punishment for sin, so also in Christ as the second Adam all men truly have been redeemed from sin, death, the devil, and hell, and God is truly reconciled with them all.

Thesis 5 – As through the substitutionary death of Christ the guilt of the sins of the entire world has been blotted out and the punishment of the same has been suffered, so also through the resurrection of Christ, *justification*, life, and salvation have been restored for the whole world and in Christ, as the Substitute for all mankind, have come to all people.

Thesis 6 – Through Christ's work of redemption for all men God brings the acquired grace, forgiveness, *justification*, life, and salvation through the means of grace. For the gospel promise which is contained in the word of the gospel and in the holy sacraments is not an empty sound or a meaningless promise, but an efficacious offering and gift of all the good things which God in this word of his grace promises.

Thesis 7 – Thus the gospel is not a mere historical account of the work of redemption that has taken place, but much more a powerful declaration of peace and of God's gracious promise to the world redeemed by Christ and thus always is an efficacious means of grace, in which God on his part brings, presents, distributes, gives, and bestows the forgiveness of sins and the righteousness won by Christ, although not all to whom God extends his earnest call of grace accept this invitation of the reconciled God and so will not share in all the resultant benefits.

Thesis 8 – Holy absolution is a preaching of the gospel to one or more persons who desire the comfort of the gospel. It is therefore in itself also always valid and efficacious because God in it declares himself through the mouth of his servant to be a God truly reconciled through the blood and death of Christ and always distributes his gift of forgiveness and righteousness to all who are absolved although there are many who will not be willing to partake of the gifts of grace offered in the gospel because of their unbelief.

Thesis 9 – The means through which alone a man comes into true possession of the gifts of grace earned by Christ and presented in Word and sacrament is faith which believes God's gracious promise and thus in this promise of God appropriates the offered gifts of the merits and righteousness of Christ and trusts in the benefits of Christ as his Redeemer and Savior. (Translation mine)

²²⁹ Schuetze, *Synodical Conference*, 61.

²³⁰ See Gottfried Fritschel, "Zur Lehre von der Rechtfertigung," *Theologische Monatshefte*. 4 (1871), 1-24. An English translation of this essay is included in *Lutheran Confessional Theology in America, 1840-1880*. ed. by Theodore Tappert (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 141-165. Fritschel contended that there is no forgiveness apart from faith. Rather forgiveness is conditioned by faith. See p. 156.

to believe God's declaration of forgiveness. Through faith an individual receives and appropriates the gifts of forgiveness and righteousness won by Jesus.

The constitution, which had been approved by all six synods, committed the members of the Synodical Conference to "the canonical writings of the Old and New Testaments, and the confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of 1580, called the Concordia."²³¹ The purpose of the Conference was to express outwardly the unity of the respective synods, to strengthen one another in faith and confession, to promote unity in doctrine and practice, and eliminate any actual or threatening disturbances of the same.

One of the purposes of the Synodical Conference was to try to eliminate problems between its member synods and their congregations. Such problems had occurred over the years because the various Lutheran synods had congregations in the same geographical areas. Members of one congregation at times joined the congregation of another synod for less than sanctified reasons. Congregations did not always honor the church discipline carried out by another synod's congregation. One of the aims of the Synodical Conference was "the endeavor to fix the limits of synods according to territorial boundaries" in order to deal more effectively with these inter-congregational problems. Another aim was "the consolidation of all Lutheran synods of America into a single, faithful, devout American Lutheran Church." At three of the earliest conventions of the Synodical Conference delegates considered "Theses about Parish Rights" (*Jus Parochiale*) which contended that parishes and congregations should have geographical boundaries and their own territory.

President Johann Sieker²³² (1839-1904) of the Minnesota Synod had been assigned a paper for the 1875 convention with the purpose of setting up rules for the merging of congregations existing in the same geographical area and determining their synodical affiliation.

²³¹ Schuetze, *Synodical Conference*, 59.

²³² Sieker had been trained at Gettysburg for service in the Wisconsin Synod. He served at Salem, Granville, 1861-1867. He accepted a call to St. Paul, Minnesota, in 1867 and became President of the Minnesota Synod in 1869. He was instrumental in leading Minnesota out of the General Council and he helped to found the Synodical Conference.

Because of the press of his duties Sieker was unable to carry out his assignment, but recommended to the 1875 convention that it might be time for the merging of the synods into state synods. The Conference established a committee to present proposals to the next convention to determine how this might be done. The committee concluded that the only way to eliminate the evils that existed among the rival German congregations was to merge all the German synods of the Synodical Conference into one church body. This body would divide itself into district or state synods.

The proposal was voted down because it was seen as impractical, obstructive, and not feasible. A resolution, however, was passed to “advise all our synods without delay to take steps to bring state synods into being, even if this does not happen everywhere at the same time, yet in any case where it can be done without difficulty, detriment, and disadvantage.” A resolution also was passed to “to establish one joint seminary and place this under the control of the Synodical Conference.” A final resolution stated, “Until the dissolution of the larger synodical bodies has taken place, it should be left up to the respective state synods whether they wished to join one of the existing general synods.”

The reaction of the various synods was mixed. Wisconsin’s resolutions on the state synod proposal provoked resentment and condemnation of the synod’s actions by Missouri Synod representatives. Wisconsin declared

1. The synod endorses and heartily approves the original plan to unite all orthodox Lutherans within the Synodical Conference into individual, independent state synods.
2. The synod asserts that it is ready for such an amalgamation into a state synod of Wisconsin as soon as the possibility is precluded that this state synod might as a district attach itself to an existing synod and thereby lose its separate identity and independence.
3. The synod asserts that it cannot view any such attachment to an existing general synod either as commanded in God’s Word or as essentially necessary for true unity and profitable and advantageous for our congregations.²³³

²³³ Wisconsin’s discussion is recorded in *Verhandlungen der Siebenundzwanzigsten Versammlung der deutsche Evangelisch-Lutherische Synode von Wisconsin und anderen*

A final resolution turned down the proposal for establishing a joint seminary and committed Wisconsin to re-open its own seminary. The synod believed that it was losing candidates for the ministry because there was no opportunity for training them in Wisconsin. The synod re-opened its own seminary in Milwaukee in 1878. From 1869 to 1878 Walther and his colleagues at St. Louis trained a number of young men who eventually made important contributions to the Wisconsin Synod, including seminary professors, August Pieper (1857-1946), J. P. Koehler (1859-1951), and John Schaller (1859-1920).

There were more efforts within the Synodical Conference to proceed with the state synod plan; within a few years, however, the project was dead. A bigger controversy involving the doctrine of election began to tear the Synodical Conference apart. Whereas the State Synod Controversy had caused hard feelings between Missouri and Wisconsin, the Election Controversy brought the two synods closer together.

Why did Wisconsin ultimately decline to participate in the state synod project? The synod's centennial history, *Continuing in His Word*, offers this explanation:

It is sometimes said that Wisconsin rejected the idea of state synods. That was not the case. Our fathers favored the plan as such, but insisted that these state synods must remain synods and not be reduced to the level of districts.

The reason is evident. Our fathers were afraid of bigness; they realized that bigness easily leads to domineering. Bigness, in which the importance of the individual member decreases in proportion to the size of the body, in which open deliberations are reduced of necessity and the work becomes departmentalized and mechanized, almost inevitably leads to create a mentality of rulers and subordinates. This is not the spirit of the Church in which all members are brothers. The idea of state synods was lost, but our Wisconsin fathers were not guilty of scuttling it.²³⁴

Although the State Synod Controversy caused hard feelings between Missouri and Wisconsin, it did not bring about a break in relations between the two synods because it was not a

Staaten, gehalten zu Watertown, Wisconsin vom 31. Mai bis 6. Juni 1877. (n.p., 1877), 19-30. Hereafter *Wisconsin Synod Proceedings*. The resolutions are recorded in the concluding pages. Translation of the three resolutions listed above by Edward C. Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, 57.

²³⁴ *Continuing in His Word*, 77.

doctrinal controversy. The controversy revolved around a difference of opinion concerning outward organization, not scriptural teaching.

The Election Controversy

The Missouri Synod had been founded in part by pastors sent to America by Pastor Wilhelm Loehe of Neuendettelsau in Bavaria. After the founding of the Missouri Synod Loehe became concerned with the Missouri Synod's doctrine of church and ministry. Loehe was concerned about the congregational church polity of the Missouri Synod and thought that giving greater authority to the clergy might prevent problems in the church. Walther and Friedrich Wyneken²³⁵ (1810-1876) traveled to Germany in 1851 to meet with Loehe in an attempt to resolve their differences. In a letter to Loehe after his return Walther expressed his joy that the differences had indeed been resolved.²³⁶ Relations between Loehe and Missouri deteriorated two years later following J.A. Grabau's visit to Loehe. Most of the Loehe men in Missouri followed Walther in his doctrine of the church and ministry. Two pastors, George Grossmann (1823-1897) and John Deindoerfer (1828-1907), broke with Missouri, left the Franconian colonies in Michigan and migrated to Iowa. In 1854 they founded the Iowa Synod.²³⁷

Problems between the two synods intensified over the handling of the case of George Schieferdecker (1815-1891), a Missouri Synod district president. Schieferdecker was convinced that chiliasm was taught in the Bible.²³⁸ He held the opinion that Christ's church would be victorious over her enemies in the last times. He held out the possibility of a double resurrection

²³⁵ Wyneken had come to America in 1838 and returned to Germany in 1841 for a time for health reasons. In Germany he published a document entitled *Notruf* to alert Lutherans in Germany to the great need for pastors in America. Wyneken came in contact with Loehe through the *Notruf*. Loehe helped Wyneken in his development as a confessional Lutheran and the Neuendettelsau pastor began a monumental task of sending pastors, candidates for the ministry, students and whole colonies to America to help meet the needs described by Wyneken. *Lutheran Cyclopedia* (1975), 831.

²³⁶ To Wm. Loehe, June 5, 1852, in *Selected Letters of C.F.W. Walther*, edited by Roy A. Suelflow (St. Louis: Concordia, 1981), 103-106.

²³⁷ Fred W. Meuser, *The Formation of the American Lutheran Church* (Columbus: The Wartburg Press, 1958), 24-25.

²³⁸ August R. Suelflow, *Georg Albert Schieferdecker and His Relation to Chiliasm in the Iowa Synod*. A Thesis Presented to the Faculty of Concordia Seminary Department of Historical Theology, May 1946, 30.

of the dead and a double return of Christ. The matter was taken up by the Missouri Synod in convention in 1857. After lengthy discussion it was decided that Schieferdecker did not stand in the same faith as the Missouri Synod. The Missouri Synod consequently severed fellowship with him.²³⁹ Schieferdecker joined the Iowa Synod²⁴⁰ but renounced chiliasm in 1875 and rejoined the Missouri Synod in 1876.

In 1858 Iowa addressed the question of millennialism because of Missouri's protest over Iowa's acceptance of Schieferdecker and another pastor whom Missouri had suspended because of his teaching of chiliasm. The Iowa Synod contended that Article XVII of the Augsburg Confession condemned "wild" millennialism, but left open further "theological elaboration" of the doctrine of the last things. The convention decided "that the eventual conversion of the Jews, a future personal Antichrist, the return of Christ to subdue Antichrist, the first resurrection (of believers), and a thousand year reign of Christ are correct elaborations on the theology of the Confessions."²⁴¹ The convention argued that these doctrines did not contradict the biblical concept of the nature of the kingdom of God, because the millennial reign would be part of the life of the church militant and not a kingdom of glory and perfection.²⁴² Iowa later made clear that these matters were "Open Questions," doctrines concerning which Lutherans might have different opinions without being divisive of fellowship.²⁴³ The Iowa theologians understood Article VII of the Augsburg Confession differently from the Missouri men. Article VII states, "And it is enough for the true unity of the church to concerning the teaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. It is not necessary that human traditions, rites, or ceremonies instituted by human beings be alike everywhere."²⁴⁴ Iowa understood the word *gospel* in the

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, 69-71.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 77.

²⁴¹ Meuser, *The Formation of the American Lutheran Church*, 57.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 57.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, 57-58.

²⁴⁴ AC, VII, 2-3. Translation from the Kolb/Wengert edition (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000).

narrow sense—the way of salvation by Christ, justification by grace through faith.²⁴⁵ Missouri understood *gospel* in the broad sense²⁴⁶ to include all of the teachings of Scripture because the word *gospel* in the article is not contrasted with other doctrines but with human ceremonies.

Relations between the two synods remained strained in subsequent decades. When a group of laymen left the Iowa Synod and requested the services of a Missouri Synod pastor, Walther wrote a letter of instruction to the pastor who was to meet with them. He urged the pastor to make sure that they were not under discipline in the congregation that they were leaving and that they understood the differences between Iowa and Missouri. Walther wrote that the pastor should make these laymen aware of Iowa's stance on doctrine, the lack of an unqualified acceptance of the Lutheran Confessions, the teaching on the Antichrist, Iowa's making open questions out of articles of faith,²⁴⁷ and their toleration of those who taught chiliasm. He also noted that Iowa pastors "have a strong inclination to interpret the office of the ministry in an imperial way and thus play the Lord of the Parish."²⁴⁸

In 1867 the Iowa Synod adopted the Toledo Theses concerning church fellowship. The theses attempted to answer the questions "What is essential to the unity of the church?"²⁴⁹ Iowa

²⁴⁵ Herman L Fritschel, *Biography of Drs. Sigmund and Gottfried Fritschel*. (Milwaukee: 1951), 70-71.

²⁴⁶ The word *gospel* in broad sense – Mark 1 1:1 – "The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God." The Formula of Concord states: "4. However, the gospel is, strictly speaking, the kind of teaching that reveals what the human being, who has not kept the law and has been condemned by it, should believe: that Christ has atoned and paid for all sins and apart from any human merit has obtained and won for people the forgiveness of sins, 'the righteousness which avails before God,' and eternal life. 5. However, because the word 'gospel' is not used in just one sense in the Holy Scripture—the reason this dispute arose in the first place—we believe, teach, and confess that when the word 'gospel' is used for the entire teaching of Christ, which is presented in his teaching ministry, as did his apostles in theirs (it is used in this sense in mark 1[:15], Acts 20[:24], then it correct to say or to write that the gospel is a proclamation of both repentance and the forgiveness of sins." FC, Ep, Art. V, par. 5-6. (Kolb/Wengert translation)

²⁴⁷ Walther seems to use the expression *articles of faith* as synonymous with his understanding of the term *fundamental doctrines*. "Fundamental doctrines pertain to the 'fundamentum' or foundation of saving faith, forgiveness of sin in Christ Jesus. Primary fundamental articles (e.g., person and work of Christ) are constitutive for saving faith and can be neither unknown nor denied without loss of salvation. Secondary fundamental doctrines (e.g., Holy Baptism, Lord's Supper) are related to the foundation of faith, but in such a way that one may be ignorant of them, yet have saving faith." *Concordia Cyclopedia* (1975), 319.

²⁴⁸ Letter dated July 17, 1865, in *Selected Writing of C.F.W. Walther: Selected Letters*. translated by Roy A. Suelflow (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1981), 115.

²⁴⁹ What is Essential to Church Unity?

hoped that the theses might lead to a better understanding with Missouri. The adoption of the theses led to a colloquy with Missouri in Milwaukee, November 13-18, 1867. However, no agreement was reached on the disputed points.²⁵⁰

The men in Iowa also kept an eye on developments in Missouri. They were well aware of some discussions on the doctrine of election that had begun already in 1855. William Sihler presented an article which presented the doctrine in the manner of the Lutheran theologians of the seventeenth century, election *intuitu fidei*.²⁵¹ Years later as the Election Controversy was disrupting the Synodical Conference, Sihler publicly renounced his statements on election *intuitu fidei*.²⁵²

In 1856-1857 Ottomar Fuerbringer (1810-1892)²⁵³ published a rather lengthy treatise on predestination in *Lehre und Wehre*.²⁵⁴ He also spoke of election in view of foreseen faith.²⁵⁵

Thesis I. The unity of the visible church consists in the pure preaching of the Gospel. This includes the administration of the sacraments.

Thesis II. Not only formal preaching but also the public confession of the church must be pure.

Thesis III. The public confession must hold fast, without error, all articles of faith if the church is to be true, i.e., the pure one.

Thesis IV. According to content, the Gospel is the doctrine of justification by faith, in connection with the other fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith.

Thesis V. Therefore, the unity of the church is truly a fundamental unity but not an absolute one, because it relates to the essential basic doctrines, not to all less important matters.

Thesis VI. Complete unity of doctrine has never existed in the church and must not be made the condition of fellowship.

Thesis VII. Fundamental or essential doctrines, however, are not only those which are fundamental for the individual Christian, but are all those which the church has defined in its Confession.

Thesis VIII. Accordingly, the symbols contain the sum of doctrines on which doctrinal agreement is necessary.

Thesis IX. However, this does not refer to all the unessential or incidentally mentioned doctrines in the confession, but to all articles of faith; these must be recognized as definitely defined by the church.

Kirchenblatt, 1867, 61. English translation in *Documents of Lutheran Unity in America*, edited by Richard C. Wolf (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966) #92. Another English translation is included in *Moving Frontiers*, edited by Carl S. Meyer (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), 283-284.

²⁵⁰ W.G. Polack, *The Building of a Great Church* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1941), 105-106. Meuser, *The Formation of the American Lutheran Church*, 58-59.

²⁵¹ "Neunzehn Thesen ueber die Lehre von der ewigen Vorherbestimmung und der gnadigen Erwaehlung zum ewigen Leben," *Lehre und Wehre*, 1855, 234ff.

²⁵² *Lehre und Wehre*, 1881, 58.

²⁵³ Ludwig Fuerbringer gives a brief biographical sketch of his father in *80 Eventful Years* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1944), 6-13. Ottomar was a close companion of Walther's and came to America in the original Saxon immigration. Ludwig quotes Dr. A.L. Graebner who called Ottomar, "the profoundest thinker among the fathers of the Missouri Synod." Ottomar served as the president of the Northern (later Michigan) District of the Missouri Synod 1854-1871, 1875-1882.

In 1858 *Lehre und Wehre* published an article by an unidentified writer on the Formula of Concord and election. The author expressed his regrets over the deviations in the teaching of election in the later Lutheran theologians. From 1860 to 1864 *Lehre und Wehre* published a series of anonymous articles on theological axioms (*Theologische Axiome*) or theses consisting of statements taken from Luther, the Lutheran confessions, and dogmaticians on various doctrines. The numbered statements were printed in Latin with a rather free German translation below each statement. Axioms on predestination appeared in February 1861. Some of the more significant of these theses are listed below.

6. There are no contradictory wills in God.
10. Predestination is not the merit of works foreseen but the gracious gift of God who elects.
11. We are chosen for eternal salvation not because of faith but through faith.
12. God to be sure has chosen those who believe, but not because they believe.
13. God is not moved by human merits or the worthiness of the human race nor by foresight of good works or faith with the result that he chose a certain person for eternal life, but this must be ascribed alone to his undeserved and infinite grace.
17. God did not make the vessels of wrath, but found them. He did not find the vessels of grace, but made them.²⁵⁶

In 1863 Walther wrote an article entitled, “*Einige Bemerkungen ueber eine neue Apologie der Reformierten Kirche*,” in which he argued against an article in the *Evangelist*, the official periodical of the German Reformed Church.²⁵⁷ The author of the article, E.W. Krummacher, had accused the Lutheran Church of departing from Luther’s teaching on free will and election and holding to a form of Semi-Pelagianism. Walther contends that the Lutheran Confessions oppose both the double predestination of Calvinism and Semi-Pelagianism or synergism. He states that foreseen faith cannot be a cause of election. For the cause of election is

²⁵⁴ “Zu der Lehre von der Gnadenwahl und einigen damit zusammenhaengenden Materien.” *Lehre und Wehre*, 1856, p. 305-316, 320-330, 354-361; *Lehre und Wehre*, 1857, p. 16-24, 54-60, 71-81, 129-139, 161-170, 193-199. For a summary of this treatise see Hans Robert Haug, *The Predestination Controversy in the Lutheran Church in North America*. (Ph.D. Dissertation, Temple University, 1967), 64-76.

²⁵⁵ *Lehre und Wehre*, 1856, 324-325.

²⁵⁶ *Lehre und Wehre* (February 1861), 36-37. In some articles on the various doctrines the sources of the statements were identified. The sources of the various statements on predestination were not identified.

²⁵⁷ *Lehre und Wehre*, (October 1863), 284-302.

“only and alone the free grace and mercy of God in Christ.”²⁵⁸ He also denies that Lutherans have departed from Luther’s teaching on free will.²⁵⁹

In 1868 Johann A. Huegli (1831-1904)²⁶⁰ presented an essay on predestination to the Northern District of the Missouri Synod. The essay was entitled, “*Vierundzwanzig Thesen ueber die Lehre von den guten Werken auf Grund der Lehre vom freien Willen, von der Gnadewahl und von der Rechtfertigung*.”²⁶¹ Huegli’s essay was in line with Walther’s teaching on predestination as presented in his 1863 *Lehre und Wehre* article. The discussion of the Huegli article did much to unify Missouri’s pastors on this doctrine.²⁶²

The first to respond to Walther’s teaching on election was Gottfried Fritschel of Iowa. Reacting to an essay by Walther on the charging of interest, Fritschel accused Walther of being too slavishly dependent on Luther. In a footnote Fritschel pointed to statements in Luther’s 1525 *De servo abitrio* (*The Bondage of the Will*) as not being tenable. His remark in the footnote set off a theological exchange that lasted two years. Iowa’s articles were printed in the *Theologische Monatshefte* published by S.K. Brobst in Allentown, Pennsylvania. Missouri’s articles were published in *Lehre und Wehre*. Missouri’s chief spokesman were Walther, H (undoubtedly Huegli), assisted by F.A. Stellhorn, A.Th. Grossberger, and Henry Wyneken (1844-1899). The spokesmen for Iowa were Gottfried Fritschel, D. Klindworth and John Klindworth (1833-1907).

It became apparent that the difference in the doctrine of election between Missouri and Iowa involved a difference in the doctrine of conversion. The teaching of the Iowa theologians can be summarized as follows:

1. Prevenient grace gives human beings a free will which can assent to the prodding of grace in conversion. This assent is a refraining from resisting the working of grace.
2. It can therefore be said that salvation depends on a person’s own personal decision.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 298. Walther also quotes Johann Gerhard in support of this point, p. 299-300.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 300.

²⁶⁰ Huegli served most of his ministry in Michigan and helped found the Lutheran School for the Deaf in Detroit. He also served as the president of the Northern District of the Missouri Synod 1872-1875. See *Lutheran Cyclopedia*, ed. by Erwin Lueker (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing house, 1975) p. 395.

²⁶¹ *Northern District Report*, 1868. For an overview and summary of this essay see Haug, 93-102.

²⁶² Haug, *The Predestination Controversy in the Lutheran Church in North America*, 99.

3. This assent or decision is not a meritorious cause of salvation but an explanatory reason.
4. Election in the strict sense is in view of foreseen faith which is a condition of election but not a meritorious cause. Rather it is an instrumental cause.
5. Election in the wider sense—God’s eternal plan to save all who believe in Jesus—is the cause of faith.
6. The different destinies of two people who hear the gospel is not to be found in the hidden will of God but in the different attitudes of the two people. This difference in the two attitudes is the enigma that cannot be explained.
7. Iowa accused Missouri of teaching absolute predestination and irresistible grace.²⁶³

Missouri’s teaching during this portion of the controversy can be summarized this way:

1. Conversion is instantaneous—there is no middle ground. A person is either a believer or an unbeliever. The ability to cooperate and a free will come only after conversion.
2. Election is a free act of God’s grace without any consideration of human willingness, merit or worthiness. Election does not take place *intuitu fidei*.
3. Election is the cause that procures, works, and guarantees salvation.
4. Those who are not elect will remain lost not because God has predestined them to damnation but because of their own sin and unbelief.
5. Election *intuitu fidei* imposes a human condition on God and makes faith a cause of election which undermines salvation by grace alone.
6. The reason why some are chosen and not others is a mystery of God’s hidden will.
7. Missouri accused Iowa of synergism.²⁶⁴

The literary controversy between the two synods was short but bitter. Gottfried Fritschel labeled Huegli’s opposition to the expression *intuitu fidei* “a gross insult to the Lutheran Church.”²⁶⁵ Missouri also responded sharply. The accusations that Missouri was guilty of Calvinism (absolute predestination, irresistible grace) and that Iowa was guilty of synergism were considered serious accusations by confessional Lutherans. The same charges would be made by the opposing sides when the Election Controversy broke out in the Synodical Conference.

Missouri and Iowa were sparring over election and conversion as the Synodical Conference was being organized. It may seem somewhat surprising in the light of later developments that the theologians of the Ohio and Norwegian synods either took no note of the

²⁶³ Based on Haug’s summary, 260-263.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 263-266.

²⁶⁵ Meuser, *The Formation of the American Lutheran Church*, p. 64. See G. Fritschel, “Zur Lehre von der Predestination,” *Theologische Monatshete*, 5 (1872), 20-32.

writings of the two sides or were not concerned about the doctrine of election as it was being presented on the pages of *Lehre und Wehre*. It was not until 1877 that lines began to be drawn in the newly founded federation.

C. F. W. Walther had been presenting a series of essays to the Western District of the Missouri Synod under the general theme, “The Doctrine of the Lutheran Church Alone Gives All Glory to God, An Irrefutable Proof That Its Doctrine Alone Is True.” Walther began the series in 1873 and finished in 1886. In 1877 Walther wrote on predestination.²⁶⁶ The discussion of predestination was moved ahead because “it was considered of vital importance that the doctrine of predestination should be treated thoroughly.”²⁶⁷ Walther notes, “We have never had more reason to approach our doctrinal discussion with fear and trembling.”²⁶⁸ It seems that the exchange between Missouri and Iowa a few years before and a desire to bring the pastors in the Missouri Synod to a better understanding of this doctrine and to maintain doctrinal unity prompted Walther’s presentation.²⁶⁹ Since this essay was seen as a presenting cause of the Election Controversy, we will examine it in some detail.

Walther proposed to answer a series of questions in his examination of predestination:

1. Does Scripture actually include a teaching of an election—involving a limited segment of mankind—to eternal salvation?
2. How is this teaching constituted according to Scripture? Do we find this teaching in our church, and again in the Confessions?
3. To what extent does this teaching, drawn up by our church from the Holy Scriptures, give all glory to God?²⁷⁰

He briefly discussed the scriptural basis for the doctrine of election. In treating Ephesians 1:3-6, 11 Walther particularly noted that predestination is an eternal decree of God with God’s grace in Christ as the eternal cause of election. We were predestined according to the

²⁶⁶ The first five theses with exposition were published in Missouri’s *Western District Proceedings*, 1877. The quotations are taken from an English translation entitled, “Predestination I,” included in C.F.W. Walther, *Essays for the Church*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1992), vol. 2, 106-148.

²⁶⁷ Introductory comments, *Ibid.*, 106.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 107.

²⁶⁹ Schuetze, *The Synodical Conference Lutherans*, 92.

²⁷⁰ Walther, “Predestination I,” 107.

pleasure of his will, not because of anything in us. In Romans 8:28-30 foreknew (*proginosko*) means *previously chosen*.²⁷¹ The understanding of this verb would be a point of contention as the controversy played out. He lamented that the newer theologians in Europe deny the doctrine of election, most notably Von Hoffmann, Vilmar, and Thomasius. A few others like Philippi still retain the orthodox doctrine.²⁷²

After these preliminary remarks Walther bases his discussion of predestination on six theses, only five of which were discussed in 1877.

Thesis I – It (namely our Lutheran church) teaches according to God’s Word “that God regards each Christian’s conversion, justification, and salvation so highly, and is so truly concerned about it, that before the foundations of the world were laid he held counsel and according to His purpose decreed how He would bring me and sustain me to this end. Furthermore, that God desired to preserve my salvation so firmly and certainly—since through the weakness and wickedness of our flesh it could easily be lost out of our own hands, or through the deceit and power of the devil and the world it could be snatched from us—that he decreed it in His eternal purpose, which cannot fail or end, and placed it in the almighty hand of our Savior Jesus Christ, out of which no one can pluck us.” It also teaches that “God in His counsel, purpose and decree not only prepared salvation in general, but graciously considered and elected to salvation each and every person of the elect who are to be saved through Christ, and has decreed that in this way, as now recounted, He would through His grace, gifts, and working help, support, and keep them.”²⁷³

In his discussion of this thesis Walther explains the comfort the doctrine of election contains. It is comforting because it teaches that salvation is certain since it lies entirely in God’s hands. Although an elect Christian may fall from grace for a time he will not die without being restored to grace once again.²⁷⁴ There is a difference between Pelagianism,, Calvinism and Lutheranism. The Pelagian says that certain people accept grace because they are better than others. The Calvinist says that because God has elected certain ones he has rejected the others. A Lutheran says that God grants his grace to one according to the good purpose of his will while the

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 108-110.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, 110-112.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, 112-113.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 113.

others reject God's grace because of their unbelief. Lutherans give all glory to God alone while all dishonor belongs to human beings.²⁷⁵

Walther notes that John Gerhard ascribes election to eternal life to God's compassion alone. He claims that this statement shows how Gerhard wants to be understood when he speaks of election *intuitu fidei*. Walther, however, writes, "To be sure, the expression is not entirely to be approved, for it gives the impression that our faith is a motivation for the dear Lord to choose us; faith is not God's motivation to save us, but rather the means whereby He overcomes us in bringing us to heaven."²⁷⁶ The expression, election *intuitu fidei*, can lead to confusion. This seemingly innocuous statement by Walther became a major point in contention.

Thesis II – It teaches: "God's eternal election not only sees and knows beforehand the salvation of the elect, but by the gracious will and pleasure of God in Christ Jesus is a *cause* which creates, works, helps, and furthers our salvation and all that pertains to it. Our salvation is so founded on this that the gates of hell cannot prevail against it, as it is written, 'My sheep no one shall pluck from My hand' [John 10:28]. Likewise: 'And as many as were ordained to eternal life became believers' [Acts 13:48]." Matt.24:24; Acts 13:48; Rom. 8:33-39; Hos. 13:9.

Walther distinguishes between simple foreknowledge and predetermination. For instance, God has the foreknowledge of evil because evil will happen. Evil does not happen because of his foreknowledge. The foreknowledge is dependent on the happening, not the happening on the foreknowledge. In regard to salvation God has both foreknowledge and predetermination. The foreknowledge is dependent on his predetermination.²⁷⁷ The relationship between predestination and faith can be seen in Acts 13:48 –"But when the gentiles heard it, they were joyful and praised the Word of the Lord; and as many as were decreed to eternal life believed."²⁷⁸ The second thesis ascribes all glory to God because it traces all good to God and all evil to the devil and human beings.²⁷⁹ Calvin with his double decree makes God out to be the

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 114.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 115.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 116.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 117.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 117-118.

devil²⁸⁰ and the Arminians succumb to Pelagianism because they ascribe a cooperation of human beings toward their salvation.²⁸¹

Thesis III – It teaches that “it is false and wrong when it is taught that not only the mercy of God and the most holy merit of Christ, but also in us is a cause of election on account of which God has chosen us for eternal life” (Eph. 1:5; Rom. 9:15; 1 Cor. 4:7); be it now:

- a. the work of man or his sanctification (2 Tim. 1:9; Titus 3:5; Eph. 2:8-9; Rom. 11:5-7);
- b. man’s proper use of the means of grace (Acts 16:14);
- c. man’s personal decision (Phil. 2:13; Eph. 2:1-5);
- d. man’s longing and prayer (Rom. 9:16);
- e. man’s nonresistance (Jer. 31:18; Is. 63:17);
- f. man’s faith (Rom. 4:16).²⁸²

In developing this thesis Walther refers to Ephesians 1:5-6: “and has decreed us to be his children through Jesus Christ, according to the pleasure of his will, to the praise of his splendid grace through which he has made us acceptable in the Beloved;” and Romans 9:15-16: “Then he said to Moses: ‘I am gracious on whom I am gracious; I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy.’ So it depends not on anyone’s will or effort, but on God’s mercy.”²⁸³ He notes that the difference between Lutherans and Calvin lies in Calvin’s teaching of double predestination, irresistible grace, and perseverance of the saints. He claims that Calvin also relegates Christ to a secondary role by making predestination and not Christ the cause of our salvation.²⁸⁴

Walther notes that conversion is entirely the work of God. If someone is not converted or later falls from faith the fault lies not with God but with the sinful human being. Why some are converted and not others is a mystery. Nevertheless we cannot blame God for those who are lost.²⁸⁵ On the other hand, human non-resistance to the work of the Holy Spirit is the work of God.²⁸⁶

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 118.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 119.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, 120.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, 122.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 123-124.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 124-125.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 134.

Perhaps the most significant part of the essay for the later controversy lies in Walther's rejection of election *intuitu fidei*.

Gerhard says that God has chosen us *in view of faith*. Others have expressed themselves contrary to this mode of expression, saying that if this [expression] is used, it behooves us to explain it more carefully. Should it have the meaning that faith is the moving cause? This cannot be acceptable. If one thereby wishes to say that God has chosen no one who does not come to faith, this is correct. Then it is a description of the elect, except that faith is not the cause of election. The cause is Christ alone. Had He not become man, no one could have been chosen, because God can forgive no sins for which there has not been an atonement. He is the righteous judge; He does not declare the guilty free unless the debt is paid. Each must have paid his debt of sin before he can be declared free. Since we cannot do this of ourselves, God must accomplish this for us. This is the reason or cause why God is able to save us, why he could choose us from eternity.²⁸⁷

Walther cites John Gerhard (1582-1637), John Olearius (1546-1623), John Quenstedt (1617-1688), Abraham Calov (1612-1686), and Conrad Dannhauer (1603-1666) to show that none of these men considered faith a meritorious or moving cause of election. Rather they taught that faith is an instrumental cause—faith is part of the order of salvation, the way God has chosen for humans to receive his promised salvation.²⁸⁸

Thesis IV – It rejects the teaching “that God does not desire everyone be saved, but, alone by mere decree, design, and will of God, without regard for their sins, has decreed their damnation, so that they cannot be saved”; it emphatically teaches “that the reason not all who have heard the Word, believe, and thus are more severely condemned is not that God does not want salvation for them. They themselves are guilty, for they have heard the Word not to learn but to despise, blaspheme, and disfigure it; and they have resisted the Holy Spirit who desires to work in them through the Word.” It also teaches that “such rejection of the Word is not because of God’s foresight (*vel praescentia, vel praedestinatio Dei*) but man’s perverted will.” (FC, Ep. Art. XI, par. 19; FC, SD, Art. XI, par. 781, 41) Ezek. 33:11; 1 Tim. 2:4-6; John 3:16; Rom. 11:32; Matt. 23:37; Acts 7:51; Prov. 1:24-31; Acts 13:46; Hos. 13:9; Rom. 9:22, cf. v 23, original text.²⁸⁹

After discussing a number of Scripture references which speak of the love of God for all of humankind and universal redemption, he presents several passages which lay the blame for rejection of God’s grace at the feet of those who are lost. Walther compares the teaching of

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 136.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 136-137.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 137.

Luther with Calvin's teaching and shows that Calvin taught a predestination to damnation while Luther did not.²⁹⁰

Thesis V – It teaches that “beyond that revealed in Christ, God has still reserved and concealed much of this mystery, and has held this for His wisdom and knowledge alone. We are not to probe these, nor are we to follow our own thoughts in this matter, draw conclusions, or brood; but we are to hold to the revealed Word. This is a reminder of utmost importance. For with such matters our curiosity is prone to be stirred, rather than with those which God has revealed in His Word, because we cannot harmonize them, for which we also have no command.” (FC, SD XI, Rom. 11:33-36, 9:18-21)

Walther emphasizes that the doctrine of election presents a mystery which must be believed because it cannot be fully reconciled with human reason. If reason attempts to resolve the mystery, it will fall into error.

It is not to be denied that in our teachings much occurs which is impossible to reconcile. Scripture teaches that whoever is chosen to eternal life is not chosen for having accomplished anything for which God had to or wanted to elect him, but that God had first removed the resistance in him. And it also teaches that those who are rejected are cast away because of their own sin and guilt. Who can reconcile this? . . . Scripture teaches that God loved all men and desired their salvation. And yet we discover that entire nations did not have God's Word for hundreds of years, and therefore were unable to reject it. For centuries they sat in darkness and the shadow of death. . . .

The false church indeed blasphemes God and says: “God does not desire to save all men; hence He gives one the false word, the other the true one; the one godless parents, the other pious; the false teachers, the other believing.” Again others say: “It is because certain ones are better than others.” Or they may say: “The heathen did not receive the Word because God foreknew that they would not believe.” Or: “They are saved because they did receive the word.” Yes, one wants to resolve it by teaching that even after death there is a possibility for conversion. These are nothing less than human speculation. Our Lutheran church is not in agreement with this—it does not mingle human speculation with the word of God. Hence our thesis states: “It teaches that concerning and beyond this. . . matters which are not revealed to us.”²⁹¹

The essay was received favorably and was approved also in the Synodical Conference. The Synodical Conference had the custom of having convention floor committees review doctrinal essays presented in the constituent synods and their districts so that doctrinal unity might be maintained. At the Synodical Conference convention in 1878 the review of Walther's essay written by Pastor C.A. Frank of the Ohio Synod spoke of the “wonderful doctrinal

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 137-144.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p.144-145.

discussion about election of grace . . . which can be read by every individual only to his blessing.”²⁹²

The first to take issue with Walther’s essay was Professor Friedrich Schmidt of the Norwegian Synod. Schmidt had been a student of Walther’s and a colleague of his at St. Louis. Schmidt had learned Norwegian while a student at St. Louis so that he could serve as a proofreader for the Norwegian Lutheran paper, *Kirketidende*. He soon also began to preach occasionally for a group of Norwegian Lutherans in St. Louis. While serving as a pastor in Baltimore, Maryland, he was visited by the Norwegian Lutheran leader, Herman Amberg Preus. Preus was surprised during their conversation when it became evident that Schmidt could speak Norwegian. He asked Schmidt to teach at the Norwegian Synod’s Luther College at Half-Way Creek, Iowa (later the college was moved to Decorah, Iowa). In 1872 Schmidt came to St. Louis to serve as the Norwegian Synod’s professor at Missouri’s St. Louis seminary. When the Norwegian Synod founded a school of its own in Madison Wisconsin, in 1876, it was only natural for Schmidt to be called to serve at that institution.²⁹³

Schmidt was on Walther’s side when Professor Ole Asperheim of the Norwegian Synod expressed concern over Missouri’s weaknesses and imperfections. When challenged to explain his concerns Asperheim is reported to have said concerning Missouri’s doctrine of election:

There exists a tendency toward a certain dogmatic deformity which becomes especially evident in the Missouri Synod’s doctrine of election. By excluding faith as a factor in election, Missouri places itself in a dangerous middle position between the Calvinistic doctrine of predestination, and the Lutheran teaching as it is explained and developed by the later Lutheran dogmaticians, e.g., Gerhard.²⁹⁴

²⁹² *Synodical Conference Proceedings, 1878*, 67.

²⁹³ Ludwig Fuerbringer, *Persons and Events: Reminiscences of Ludwig Ernest Fuerbringer*. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947), 148-151.

²⁹⁴ Georg J. Fritschel, *Geschichte der Lutherischen Kirche in Amerika*, (Guetersloh: Verlag C. Bertelsmann, 1896) II, 362ff. Quoted by Haug, *The Predestination Controversy in the Lutheran Church in North America*, 271.

In 1878 Schmidt defended Missouri. He called Asperheim's charges "a mentality which could not be tolerated in the case of a teacher of the church."²⁹⁵ When the Norwegian Synod began to take steps against him, Asperheim resigned his professorship and accepted a call to a parish in New York.

Schmidt seems to have sought the call to become Missouri's English professor of theology in 1878.²⁹⁶ He seems to have been hurt when he did not receive that call.²⁹⁷ On January 2, 1879, Schmidt notified Walther of his objections to his 1877 essay. He told Walther, "I can no longer go with you. . . I dare no longer keep silence."²⁹⁸ Schmidt soon contacted President Schwan of the Missouri Synod to let him know that he was going to make his objections public unless circumstances changed. When he began to speak against Walther's 1877 essay at the convention of Missouri's Northwestern District in 1879, President Schwan of Missouri admonished him and arranged for a private meeting with District President Fuerbringer in Frankenmuth, Michigan. Schwan also reminded him of the Synodical Conference agreement

²⁹⁵ Haug, 271.

²⁹⁶ Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, p. 157. Koehler claims that at one time there was documented proof of Schmidt's seeking the Saint Louis professorship. See Christian Hochstetter, *Die Geschichte der Evangelisch-lutherischen Missouri-Synode in Nord-Amerika, und ihre Lehrkämpfe von der saechsischen Auswanderung im Jahre 1838 an bis Jahre 1884*. (Dresden: Verlag von Heinrich J. Naumann, 1885) p. 354-355. Hochstetter claims that Schmidt sent a postcard dated 7 May 1878 to a Missouri district president expressing his willingness to accept such a call. He indicated that he had also been nominated for professorship at the Ohio Synod's seminary in Columbus. He hoped that Missouri would not consider the needs of the Norwegian Synod and pass him by or he would have to accept the call to Columbus. Schmidt seems to have thought that Walther had objected to him being called to St. Louis. That evidently was not the case. See "The Cost of Confessionalism: A Research paper Tracing the Developments of the Five Most Significant Years of the Election Controversy within the Synodical Conference," by Howard Festerling, Senior Church History Thesis, 1977. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, WI, 5-7.

²⁹⁷ Both Missouri and Wisconsin Synod historians have suggested that this may have been the reason for Schmidt's opposition to Walther's teaching on election. See *Moving Frontiers*, ed. by Carl S. Meyer (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964) p. 271 and Armin Schuetze, *The Synodical Conference*, p. 93. Schmidt's brother-in-law, Pastor Henry Allwardt, disputes this accusation. He claims to have spoken with Schmidt about Walther's essay in March 1878, fully two months before the convention that failed to issue the call to Schmidt. Both he and Schmidt at that time were one in their concerns about Walther's essay. Henry A. Allwardt, "Appendix to A Testimony against the False Doctrine of Predestination recently introduced by the Missouri Synod," translated by R.C.H. Lenski and W.E. Tressel in *The Error of Modern Missouri: Its Inception Development, and Refutation*, George H. Schodde, ed (Columbus: Lutheran Book Concern, 1897) 788-789. On the other hand, years later Stellhorn still expressed resentment that he and Schmidt were "not sufficiently orthodox to be considered candidates for such a position." See Stellhorn, "The Present Controversy on Predestination: A Contribution to Its History and Proper Estimate," in *The Error of Modern Missouri: Its Inception, Development and Refutation*, 185.

²⁹⁸ William A. Baepler, *A Century of Grace* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947), 200.

not to make public attacks against each other until all other ways of settling doctrinal disputes had been attempted.²⁹⁹ Two Missouri pastors, Frederick W. Stellhorn and Henry A. Allwardt, were among others who objected to what Walther had written.

Walther continued his essay on election at the 1879 convention of Missouri's Western District.³⁰⁰ Since this essay served to enflame some of Walther's opponents, we will examine it in some detail. Walther explained his purpose and approach to the subject of election in this way:

Two years ago when we dealt with election by grace, we were very sorry that we could not also discuss in detail the final thesis, dealing with the *use* of this doctrine. I am now firmly convinced that it was part of God's gracious providence that we were unable to discuss that thesis. In the first place, we could only have treated it very superficially even though it is one of the most important, of the theses. At the same time it was not our purpose to present the whole doctrine of election by grace in all of its ramifications; rather, we wanted only to speak about those parts of the doctrine which made it clear that our dear Lutheran church in its presentation of this doctrine also gives all glory to God. We left everything else aside.³⁰¹

Walther admitted that the incomplete presentation in 1877 could have left some things "vague and obscure, possibly even offensive" to some readers. He hoped that the present essay would clear up any confusion that might have been caused by the essay presented two years before.³⁰² The presentation involved the discussion of five theses.

Thesis I – All Scripture, inspired by God, should minister not to security and impenitence, but 'to reproof, correction and improvement' (2 Tim. 3:16). Furthermore, everything in the Word of God is written down for us, not for the purpose of thereby driving us to despair but in order that by 'steadfastness, by the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope' (Rom. 15:4). From this it is beyond all doubt that the true understanding or *right use* of the teaching of God's eternal foreknowledge *will in no way cause or support either impenitence or despair*. (Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Art. XI)³⁰³

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 200-201.

³⁰⁰ This essay was published in Missouri's *Western District Proceedings, 1879*. The quotations are taken from an English translation entitled, "Predestination II," included in C.F.W. Walther, *Essays for the Church*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1992), vol. II, 149-197.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 149-150.

³⁰² *Ibid.*, 150. See also 164 – "At our last convention it was not our purpose to present the doctrine of election systematically. That would, of course, have required us to take up the entire doctrine. Our sole purpose then was to select from this doctrine those items which clearly show that the Lutheran church, in this doctrine just as in all the other doctrines, gives all glory to God alone. It is, therefore, an unjust criticism of our essay when one does not keep this in mind."

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, 150.

In discussing this thesis Walther contended that the touchstone for doctrine was whether the teaching led to greater comfort and greater sanctification. He claimed that Calvin's absolute, double predestination can produce no comfort because it turns people to their inner feelings rather than God's gospel promises in the means of grace. On the other hand, Calvin's doctrine can also lead to carnal security because of the related teaching of the perseverance of the saints (once saved, always saved).³⁰⁴

Walther admitted the difficulty of the doctrine of election for human reason, but contended that one should not try to do away with the difficulties in a misguided attempt to protect one's hearers. The proper application of the law and the gospel will keep people from carnal security and despair. The doctrine of election is intended for the comfort of the Christian in the certainty of his salvation.³⁰⁵ However, in explaining God's grace in election Walther came dangerously close to the Calvinistic teaching that God is not serious about the grace he offers to the non-elect.

When God gives the grace of faithfulness to the elect, the nonelect have no right to accuse God of not giving them the same rich measure of grace, for God does not owe us a special, greater measure of it. . . Fathers act much the same way in regard to their children. Many fathers love one child more than others because it is obedient and gives him more joy than the others do. He provides all of them with food and drink, also provides them with much joy, but he shows a greater love to his "pet child." Our dear God treats us in a similar way, except that he doesn't even consider whether we've been obedient or not; He simply does what He wishes.³⁰⁶

Some would later point to this and other expressions as evidence that Walther was guilty of Crypto-Calvinism; others agreed with Walther in substance but sought to correct what they saw as imprecise expressions.

Thesis II – An answer to the following question is necessary for the future exposition and *salutary use* of the teaching of God's foreknowledge to salvation (*de divina praedestione electorum ad salutem*): Since only the elect 'whose names are written in the book of life' will be saved, how can and should one comfort themselves with this teaching? We should not pass judgment on the basis of reason, or on the basis of the

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 151-153.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 154-157.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 157.

Law, or on the basis of some *outward appearance*. (Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Art. XI)³⁰⁷

The doctrine of election is a doctrine of comfort. Comfort is based on the certainty of one's election and salvation. Certainty of election and certainty of salvation are one and the same thing. The goal of a Lutheran pastor is to lead people to such certainty and comfort.

Such certainty cannot come from rational speculation about whether one is among the elect. When election is judged by human reason the natural result is either despair or an Epicurean life. Calvin's doctrine of absolute double predestination accords with human reason but ends up in a fatalism that is not much different from that of the Turks.³⁰⁸

Certainty of election cannot be based on the law of God because the law condemns. The law removes any idea of worthiness or merit because it reveals that humans are unworthy. Only the gospel of God's gracious forgiveness in Christ alone can bring certainty of salvation.³⁰⁹

Walther warns about passing judgment on election by outward appearance or circumstances. Outward success in this life is not proof that one is numbered among the elect. Neither are problems and suffering an indication that one is not among the elect. We are to seek certainty even in times of trouble in the sure promises of God's Word.³¹⁰

Thesis III – Neither should we permit ourselves to try to *explore the secret and hidden abyss of divine foreknowledge*. Instead we must heed the revealed will of God. (Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Art. XI)

The doctrine of election must be viewed in the total context of God's plan of salvation. As Paul teaches in his letter to the Romans, "But those He predestined He also called; those He called He also justified; those He justified He also glorified." Each follows the other. The elect will be called, justified, and glorified. God has told us precisely what he will do with each of those whom he has chosen. It is God's plan to bring the elect to faith through the proclamation of the law which convicts and the sinner and the gospel which comforts him with God's certain

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 157.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 158-161.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 161-162.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 162.

word of forgiveness. Walther notes that the Formula of Concord speaks of eight points or doctrines which must be emphasized along with the doctrine of election:

1. God has redeemed the human race;
2. Christ's merit and the benefits of his redemption are offered through word and sacraments;
3. The Holy Spirit works through the word to bring people to faith;
4. God justifies those who in faith accept Christ'
5. God sanctifies those whom he has justified;
6. God protects those whom he has justified from the devil, the world, and their own sinful flesh;
7. He strengthens and preserves them if they cling to God's Word and persevere in his grace;
8. He will finally save and glorify those whom he has elected, called, and justified.³¹¹

These teachings must all be presented but they do not constitute the doctrine of election.

A distinction must be made between the decree of election and how it is revealed in the Bible.

No one will be saved apart from this order of salvation. Christians find their certainty of election by looking at God's revealed will in his Word by which God calls people to repentance and faith and brings them salvation.³¹²

In this context, however, Walther makes a statement that some saw as a denial of the seriousness of God's offer of his grace to all. Walther writes,

This much I know: If my gracious God has not from eternity determined to save me, I would not be saved. Even if God gave me His Word and Spirit, I would still fall away. After all, Adam and Eve fell away, and they were better people than we. What would become of us? No, it is God who determined everything He would do in order to save people.³¹³

Walther's point was that salvation rests in God's hands. If salvation depended even partly on human beings, they could not be saved.

Thesis IV – Therefore no one who wants to be saved should burden and torture himself with thoughts concerning the *secret counsel of God*, if he has been elected to eternal life. With such thoughts the troublesome adversary is accustomed to tempt and vex pious hearts. On the contrary, they should listen to *Christ*, who is the “book of life” and of the eternal election of God's children to eternal life, and who testifies to all men without distinction that God wants all men who are laden and burdened with sin to come to him and find refreshment and be saved.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, 163-164.

³¹² *Ibid.*, 164-165.

³¹³ *Ibid.*, 165.

According to Christ's teaching they are to desist from sins, repent, believe his promise, and trust in him completely and entirely. And since we are unable to do this by our own powers, the Holy Spirit wills to work such repentance and faith in us through the Word and sacraments. And in order that we may *see it through and abide and persevere in it*, we should implore God to give us his grace, of which he has assured us in holy Baptism, and *not doubt* that according to his promise he will give it to us. (Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration Art. XI [Tappert, pp. 627 f.])³¹⁴

Walther contends that when Peter encourages his readers to make their calling and election sure (2 Peter 1:10), he is saying that it is possible to be certain. Paul uses the doctrine of election to comfort his readers (Romans 8:28-30). Comfort would not be possible if a person could not be certain of his election. Having faith involves certainty and confidence. Walther, however, distinguishes between being unmistakably sure and being absolutely sure. He writes,

For I must always remember that, of course, if I were to become a maliciously evil scamp who rejects the Lord Jesus, and if I were to plunge back into the mudhole of the world, wallowing in it like a pig, then God has given me no *security*. Then he will say, "Let him die." Then I would be even worse off than before. But while I know this and always take it into account, yet I firmly believe that my dear Lord Jesus will not desert me; for my comfort is not that *I* have chosen Christ, but that *He* has chosen me.; not that *I* am faithful, but that *He* is faithful; not that *I* remain in Christ, but that *He* remains in me; and therefore I am unshakeable in my conviction that *I shall be saved*. The Lord will see me through.³¹⁵

Certainty of election is based on Christ and the gospel and on one's calling and faith. Absolute certainty is a certainty that remains in effect regardless of what a person does.³¹⁶ Such a certainty would be contrary to Scripture. A pastor should consider all of his members to be among the elect, but treat them as if he still had to make them elect. For it is only by calling people to repentance and pointing them to their Savior that people are brought to heaven. God calls the elect through the gospel to bring them salvation.³¹⁷

Thesis V – Next, since the Holy Spirit dwells in the elect who have come to faith as he dwells in his temple, and is not idle in them but urges them to obey the commandments of God, believers likewise should not be idle, still less oppose the urgings of the Spirit of God, but should exercise themselves in all Christian virtues, in all godliness, modesty, temperance, patience, and brotherly love, and *should diligently seek to "confirm their call*

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 167-168.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 168-170; quote on 169-170.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 179.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 184-185.

and election” so that the more they experience the power and might of the Spirit within themselves, *the less they will doubt their election*. (Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Art. XI [Tappert, p. 628])³¹⁸

Christians do not do good works because they are forced or commanded to do so, but voluntarily and with joy. No one has to tell a tree to bear fruit. It does so because that is its nature. In the same way it is the nature of Christian to do good. A Christian is zealous in doing good not in order to become one of the elect, but in order to be sure that he is one of the elect. When the Christian sees that God is at work in him leading him to do things which are contrary to his sinful nature, that gives him certainty. The more seriously a person takes the matter of Christian living the more certain he will also be of his election. Such zeal and faithfulness are the product of election, not the cause.³¹⁹

When Walther continued his essay on election at the Western District convention in 1879, Schmidt believed that Walther had violated the Synodical Conference policy by speaking of those who had disagreed with his presentation without naming names. In a meeting with Walther in July 1879 both Schmidt and Walther had agreed to abide by that policy and not to discuss their differences in the doctrine of election publicly until they had another opportunity to have another face-to-face meeting to discuss the issues.

Schmidt knew that when Walther mentioned his “opponents,” he had Schmidt in mind. Walther probably thought that he had not violated the agreement because he was not accusing anyone by name and was merely continuing his series of doctrinal essays begun in 1873 (and not completed until 1886) for Missouri’s Western District. Perhaps he also thought that “publicly” meant in periodicals for the general public, not convention essays.³²⁰

In January of 1880 Schmidt began publishing a new theological journal called *Altes und Neues* to make his views known. The publication of this journal served to fan the flames of controversy into a raging fire. According to *The Lutheran Witness*, in January 1880 Schmidt sent

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 192.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 192-196.

³²⁰ Festerling, “The Cost of Confessionalism.” 9.

a copy of his paper to every pastor and teacher in the Synodical Conference. The first issue contained this accusation: “In the publications of the Missouri Synod, a doctrine concerning election had been set forth and defended, which to our knowledge, is an anti-Scriptural and anti-Confessional Calvinizing error. In recent reports of the Western District (1877 and 1879) this erroneous doctrine has fully ripened.”³²¹

The appearance of Schmidt’s periodical did not meet with a positive response from the periodicals of the Ohio, Wisconsin (and Minnesota), or Norwegian synods. Only the General Synod’s *Lutheran Observer* seemed pleased that Schmidt was challenging Walther and the Missouri Synod.³²²

Schmidt criticized Walther for rejecting the teaching of election *intuitu fidei* and teaching that election is the cause of faith. He accused the Missouri Synod leader of teaching irresistible grace and absolute predestination based on an unconditional, hidden will of God.³²³ Schmidt’s approach to understanding Scripture involved the use of what he called the analogy of faith.

In summa, the analogy of faith must also be the rule of proper exposition of Scripture in this question. God’s word clearly and distinctly teaches that the preconceived counsel of God for salvation, which was hidden from the world, is revealed in the gospel, and that the secret of God’s will according to his plan and providence must most exactly agree with the revelation and actual materialization of His will in time. . . But the revealed gospel always makes the decision for salvation dependent on faith in Christ.³²⁴

The difference in doctrine between these two theologians had at its source a difference in approach to Scripture. The expression “analogy of faith” and its use as a hermeneutical tool would receive considerable discussion in the first decade of the twentieth century.

Walther was supported by the noted exegete on the St. Louis faculty, Professor George Stoeckhardt (1842-1913). In 1880 Stoeckhardt published an article in *Lehre und Wehre* entitled, “Scriptural Proof for the Doctrine of Predestination,” in which he lays out the exegetical basis for

³²¹ *The Lutheran Witness*, 1 (June 21, 1882), 4.

³²² See Festerling, “The Cost of Confessionalism,” 10-11.

³²³ Haug, *The Predestination Controversy in the Lutheran Church in North America*, 345.

³²⁴ Friedrich Schmidt, “Zeugnisse lutherischer Lehrer über die Gewissheit der Bekehrung und Erwählung, *Altes und Neues*, (1880) 125. English translation by Haug, 341.

Walther's doctrine.³²⁵ His purpose is to draw out the doctrine from the passages that speak about election and then show that the Formula of Concord teaches the same thing.

Stoeckhardt treats at length the verb "foreknew" in Romans 8:29 because the understanding of this verb is central to the controversy. He notes that the object of that verb is the same object of the verbs which follow (predestine, call, justify, glorify). To add "who would believe" to the words "those he foreknew" is not warranted by the context or the parallelism. "Those he foreknew is a complete thought in itself. The word 'foreknow' in Greek means 'know beforehand, take, make one's own or in broader sense: resolve something beforehand.'"³²⁶ He contends that in the expression "chosen in him (i.e., Christ) before the foundation of the world" (Eph 1:4) the "in him" cannot be connected to "us" but must be a modifier of "chosen." One cannot read "in view of foreseen faith" into the passage. The passage rather means that we were chosen *through* Christ or *for the sake of* Christ. The Greek preposition *ev* is used that way in both classical and biblical Greek.³²⁷ Although Stoeckhardt does not use the expression "analogy of faith," it is evident that he would be against that kind of hermeneutical approach to Scripture which relies on a harmonization of the doctrines of Scripture. He tells his readers that the simple words of Scripture must stand. One dare not rationalize or go beyond the simple words.³²⁸ He believes that is the approach indicated by Scripture itself.

Holy Scripture, therefore, gives us – this remark by way of passing – a meaningful suggestion that in the exposition of the doctrine of election we should guard against drawing our own conclusions, even obviously correct conclusions, and hold simply to the words and thought which the Holy Spirit has inspired.³²⁹

³²⁵ The article appeared in *Lehre und Wehre*, 26 (June-October 1880). An English translation can be found in Dr. George Stoeckhardt, *Predestination Election*. Trans. by Erwin W. Koehlinger. (Ft. Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, nd) 1-70. All references will be to this translation.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, 18-23. Modern scholarship supports Stoeckhardt's understanding. See Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Trans by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 710. See also *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Gerhard Kittel, ed., Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964)1, 715.

³²⁷ Stoeckhardt, *Predestination-Election*, 32-41.

³²⁸ *Ibid.*, 7, 67-68.

³²⁹ *Ibid.*, 49.

President Schwan of the Missouri Synod called a special pastoral conference to be held in Chicago September 29-October 5, 1880, to secure unity in the understanding of the doctrine of election among the pastors of his synod. Over 500 pastors attended as well as some guests from the Wisconsin and Norwegian synods. The conference discussed and adopted the following thirteen theses.

1. We believe, teach, and confess, that God loved the whole world from eternity, created all men unto salvation, none unto damnation, and that He earnestly wills the salvation of all men; and we therefore reject and condemn with all our heart the contrary Calvinistic doctrine.³³⁰
2. We believe, teach and confess, that the Son of God came into the world for all men, that he bore and expiated the sins of all men, and that He fully redeemed all men, none excepted; we therefore reject and condemn the contrary Calvinistic doctrine with all our heart.
3. We believe, teach, and confess, that God calls through the means of grace all men earnestly, that is, with the purpose that they should, through these means, be brought to repentance and faith, also be preserved therein unto their end, and thus be finally led to blessedness, conformable to which purpose God offers them through the means of grace the salvation wrought by Christ's atonement and the power to embrace this salvation by faith; and we therefore reject and condemn the contrary Calvinistic doctrine with all our heart.
4. We believe, teach, and confess, that no one perishes because God was not willing that he be saved, passed by him with His grace, and because He had not also offered him the grace of perseverance and was not willing to bestow the same upon him. But all men perish because of their own fault, because of their unbelief, and because they contumaciously resisted the Word and grace unto their end. The cause of this contempt of the Word is not God's foreknowledge (*vel praescientia vel praedestinatio*), but man's perverted will which rejects or perverts the means and the instrument of the Holy Spirit, which God offers unto it through the call, and it resists the Holy Spirit who would be efficacious and operate through the Word, as Christ says: Matth. 23:37, How often would I have gathered you together, and ye would not. (*Form. of Concord* p. 718 par. 41.) Therefore we reject and condemn the contrary Calvinistic doctrine with all our heart.
5. We believe, teach, and confess, that the elect or predestined persons are the only true believers, who truly believe unto their end or yet at the end of their life; we reject therefore and condemn the error of Huber,³³¹ that election is not particular, but universal and pertains to all men.
6. We believe, teach, and confess, that the divine decree of election is unchangeable and that therefore no elect person can become reprobate and perish, but that

³³⁰ The theses are condemning the doctrine of limited atonement declared at the Synod of Dort (1619).

³³¹ Samuel Huber (ca. 1547-1624) was a Calvinist; he left the Reformed camp and subscribed to the *Formula of Concord*. In attempting to oppose the Reformed doctrine of limited atonement Huber equated election with the universal atonement and grace of God: including unbelievers, heretics, and the godless in a far-reaching election of grace; he fell into universalism and rejected a particular election.

every one of the elect will surely be saved; and we therefore reject and condemn the contrary Huberian error with all our heart.

7. We believe, teach, and confess, that it is foolish and soul-endangering, leads either to carnal security or despair to endeavor to become or be sure of our own election or eternal happiness by means of searching out the eternal secret decree of God; and we reject and condemn the contrary doctrine as an injurious fanatic notion with all our heart.
8. We believe, teach, and confess, that a true believer ought to endeavor to become sure of his election from God's revealed will; and we therefore reject and condemn the opposite Papistical error that one may become or be sure of his election and salvation only by means of a new immediate revelation.
9. We believe, teach, and confess: (1) That election does not consist in the mere fact that God foresaw which men will secure salvation; (2) That election is also not the mere purpose of God to redeem and save men, which would make it universal and extend in general to all men; (3) That election does not embrace those 'which believe for a while' (Luke 8:13). (4) That election is not a mere decree of God to lead to bliss all those who would believe unto their end; we therefore reject and condemn the opposite errors of Rationalists, Huberians, and Arminians with all our heart.
10. We believe, teach and confess, that the cause which moved God to elect, is alone his grace and the merit of Jesus Christ, and not anything good foreseen by God in the elect, not even faith foreseen in them by God; and we therefore reject and condemn the opposite doctrines of the Pelagians, Semi-Pelagians and Synergists as blasphemous, dreadful errors which subvert the Gospel and therewith the whole Christian religion.
11. We believe, teach, and confess, that election is not the mere divine foresight or prescience of the salvation of the elect, but also a cause of their salvation and of whatever pertains to it; and we therefore reject and condemn the opposite doctrines of the Arminians, Socinians, and of all Synergists with all out heart.
12. We believe, teach, and confess, that God has also concealed and kept secret many things concerning the mystery of election and reserved them for His wisdom and knowledge alone, into which no human being is able and ought to search; and we therefore reject every attempt to inquire curiously also into these things which have not been revealed, and to harmonize with our reason those things which seem contradictory to our reason, may such attempts be made by Calvinistic or Pelagianistic or Synergistic doctrines of men.
13. We believe teach and confess, that it is not only not useless, much less injurious, but necessary and salutary that the mysterious doctrine of election, in so far as it is clearly revealed in God's Word, be presented also publicly to Christian people, and we therefore do not agree with those who hold that entire silence should be kept thereon, or that its discussion should only be indulged in by learned theologians.³³²

³³² *Achtzehnter Synodal-Bericht der Allgemeine deutsche ev.-luth. Synode von Missouri, Ohio, und anderen Staaten.* Versammelt als Dritte Delegates Synode zu Fort Wayen, Indiana, in Jahre 1881. St. Louis: Lutherische Concordia-Verlag, 1881, 33-35. Hereafter, *Missouri Synod Proceedings*. The English translation is printed in *Moving Frontiers*, ed. by Carl S. Meyer (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), 272-273. Note that thesis 8 points to the revealed will of God, *i.e.*, the universal grace, universal atonement, and universal forgiveness revealed in the gospel. The gospel leads people to

These thirteen theses were subsequently adopted not only by the Missouri Synod in convention but also by the Synodical Conference in 1882.³³³

The theses walk the middle ground between Calvinism and synergism. They distinguish between God's foreknowledge and his election and reject both the teaching that equates election with God's purpose to redeem and save all men and the teaching that equates election with God's decree to save those who believe until their end. The theses warn against using human reason to attempt to harmonize teachings in Scripture which appear to contradict each other or trying to peer into the hidden will of God.

In an attempt to avoid schism in the Synodical Conference the theological professors, and the synodical and district presidents of the various synods met in Milwaukee, January 5-10, 1881. Synodical Conference President W. F. Lehmann had previously been asked to call a special meeting of the Synodical Conference to discuss the issues threatening the Synodical Conference. He apparently did not believe that he had the authority to do so. He was also probably ill at the time since he died on December 1, 1880.³³⁴ The January 1881 meeting reached an impasse on the meaning of "foreknow" in Romans 8:29. Schmidt and his followers stated that this term simply meant God's consciousness of a fact. He knew who would believe. Walther contended that the term meant an effective foreknowing—making them his own. Before the colloquy adjourned it was decided to destroy the minutes of the five-day meeting.³³⁵ The failure of the colloquy resulted in what amounted to a declaration of theological war. An editor of the Ohio

believe that they are forgiven and thus are among the elect. Thesis 12 condemns the attempt to explain why some are saved and not others. This belongs to God's hidden will. Human reason will answer the question either by blaming God for those who are lost (predestination to damnation) or finding a reason in human beings why they are saved and not others (Pelagianism, semi-Pelagianism, or synergism).

³³³ Schuetze, *The Synodical Conference*, 107.

³³⁴ Roy A. Sueflow, *Walking with Wise Men*. (Milwaukee: The South Wisconsin District of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, 1967), 118.

³³⁵ *Ibid.*, 118-119. No reason was given for destroying the minutes. It may have been an attempt to keep people from fanning the flames of controversy. If so, it did not work. Even though there was no official record of the meeting adopted by the participants, Sueflow states that both Walther's and Schmidt's subsequent reports of the colloquy agree in the essentials.

Synod periodical, *Lutheran Standard*, sadly commented after receiving a copy of an account of the colloquy which appeared under Walther's name in *Der Lutheraner*,

But what surprised us and filled us with deep sorrow, is the combative spirit manifested at the Milwaukee colloquium and now threatened to be carried out. After stating "that the proposition by Prof. Frank for holding another colloquium, and in the meantime both parties withholding all controversial articles, had failed by Prof. Schmidt's declaration that he could not and would not consent thereto, as he has God's command for carrying on this controversy," Dr. Walther adds: "*Wohlan, ihr wollet Krieg; ihr sollt Krieg habe.*" (Well, you want war; war you shall have).³³⁶

About a month later Ohio's Matthias Loy began the publication of his theological journal, *Columbus Theological Magazine*. The doctrine of predestination was the main focus of the magazine. Missouri's F. W. Stellhorn resigned from Missouri's college in Ft. Wayne, Indiana, and accepted a call to the Ohio Synod's seminary in Columbus.³³⁷

Loy published an article in 1881 summarizing his doctrine of election in comparison with the teaching of Walther.³³⁸ Loy states that Missouri teaches an election unto faith rather than in view of faith. Although he says that this expression of the doctrine can be understood correctly, Loy objects to Walther's statement that the elect "shall and must be saved, and no others."³³⁹ Loy accuses Walther of teaching absolute predestination and contends that in eternity God elected only those whom he foresaw "did not pertinaciously resist the grace of God unto salvation."³⁴⁰ If faith were represented as a work which is meritorious, then faith could not be considered a cause of election. But "the question is not whether a soul must by its own strength believe and thus acquire some righteousness of its own before God can decree its salvation, but whether Christ must first be embraced before God can look upon a child as his child and heir."³⁴¹ "There is a close analogy between the relation of faith to justification on the one hand and to election on the

³³⁶ *Lutheran Standard*. 39 (Feb. 12, 1881), 49.

³³⁷ Meuser, *The Formation of the American Lutheran Church*. 67.

³³⁸ Matthias Loy, "Election and Justification," *The Columbus Theological Magazine*. I (1881), 273-288. The article is included in *Lutheran Confessional Theology in America, 1840-1880*. ed by Theodore Tappert (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 209-222. All references will be to the Tappert volume.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*, 209.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 211.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 216.

other.”³⁴² Missouri’s teaching always leads to an arbitrary will of God in election “where the bad odors of Calvinism sicken the soul.”³⁴³ Although Loy does not use the expression *analogy of faith*, he implies an approach to Scripture that attempts to harmonize the teachings of Scripture rationally on the basis of justification by faith.

The Missouri Synod convention held at Ft. Wayne May 11-21, 1881, adopted the thirteen theses on election previously discussed in the pastoral conference in 1880 as the official position of the Missouri Synod.³⁴⁴ The theses were presented and voted on without discussion, probably because much time had been spent in discussion at pastoral conferences. There were five dissenting votes.³⁴⁵ The Missouri Synod convention also adopted these instructions for their delegates to the Synodical Conference:

1. You are not to sit together and deliberate about church affairs with such as publicly decried us as Calvinists.
2. You are to recognize no synod as a member of the Synodical Conference which as a synod has accused us of Calvinism.³⁴⁶

Because some in the Ohio Synod had accused the Missouri Synod of Calvinism, the Ohio Synod was confronted with the possibility that their delegates might not be seated at the upcoming Synodical Conference convention. Missouri’s resolution and Missouri’s dominant numerical position in the Synodical Conference seemed to indicate that such a scenario was probable. In the aftermath of Ohio’s special synodical convention Loy explained that Ohio was forced by Missouri to take some actions the synod would have preferred not to take.

We can see only sin in setting altar against altar, where there is no ground in conscience and unwisdom in dividing where union gives strength. But by the action of the Missouri Synod all our hopes were frustrated. What could we do, when the doctrine of that synod seemed to us to endanger precious souls, but to express our dissent from it and to oppose it as leading to a form of error which our Church has always condemned as Calvinistic? And because we have been constrained in conscience to declare our opposition and according to the gift imparted to us to give a reason for it, the great Missouri Synod

³⁴² *Ibid.*, 219.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*, 220.

³⁴⁴ *Missouri Synod Proceedings, 1881*, 41

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 41-42. The five were H.A. Allwardt, J.H. Doermann, P. Eirch, H. Ernst, and C.H. Rohe. Allwardt was the brother-in-law of F. Stellhorn. The *Proceedings* include the reasons each gave for his “no” vote.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 45.

declares that it will not meet with us and talk in a fraternal way about the difference. Our Synod must take a strange position indeed, if it could consent to have certain men, whom it prefers to elect as delegates, set aside because Missouri will no longer recognize these as brethren, and elect others who may be acceptable to Missouri.³⁴⁷

Ohio's special synodical convention in 1881 thoroughly discussed the doctrine of election on the basis of four published theses and adopted them as official synodical doctrine. The theses make foreseen faith the rule by which God determined whom among individuals he elected to salvation. They maintain that an individual cannot be certain before the hour of his death that he is among the elect.

1. If by election we understand, as is done in the Formula of Concord, the entire "purpose, counsel, will, and ordination of God pertaining to our redemption, vocation, justification, and salvation," we believe, teach, and confess that election is *the cause* of our salvation and everything that in any way pertains to it, therefore also our redemption and vocation, of our faith and perseverance in faith. Thus understood, election precedes faith as the cause precedes its effect.
2. But if by election, as the dogmaticians generally do, we understand *merely this*, that from eternity God elected and infallibly ordained to salvation certain individuals in preference to others, and this according to the universal way of salvation, we believe, teach, and confess that election took place *in view of Christ's merit apprehended by faith*, or more briefly stated but with the same sense, *in view of faith*. According to this understanding faith precedes election in the mind of God, as *the rule*, according to which one selects, precedes the *election* itself, and thus election properly speaking, is not the cause of faith.
3. The mystery in election consists *not* in this, that we do not with certainty know from the Word of God according to what rule God proceeded in the selection of persons, but in this: (a) That no one except God *knows* who belongs to the elect; (b) That we creatures are unable to fathom and comprehend the wonderful guidance and dispensation of the grace of God towards individuals as well as whole nations.
4. The *certainty* of the individual that *he* belongs to the elect is, before his hour of death, *conditional* or *regulated* [*geordnete*] certainly, that is, bound to a certain condition or order; under this condition and in this order, however, it is infallible.³⁴⁸

The theses assert that the Formula of Concord teaches election in a wide sense of the term including the whole order of salvation. They claim that election in the narrow sense of the term must include foreseen faith as a cause of election so that there is no mystery in a hidden will of God but a mystery in knowing who is to be numbered among the elect.

³⁴⁷ *Lutheran Standard*, 39 (Sept 24, 1881), 300.

³⁴⁸ *Minutes of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Ohio and Other States*, 1881, 10-11 Columbus: Lutheran Book Concern, 1881. Hereafter *Ohio Synod Proceedings*. Reprinted in *Documents of Lutheran Unity in America*, 203-204.

That same convention passed the following resolution officially withdrawing from the Synodical Conference only nine years after its founding.

Resolved, That the Joint Synod of Ohio and other States, much as it regrets the step, herewith separates itself from the Synodical Conference of North America, because the honorable Synod of Missouri, which, as is known represents the great majority of the Synodical Conference, has

1. Set forth and definitely adopted (last May) a doctrine concerning election which we cannot accept; and
2. Has definitely declared that it cannot confer with the majority of the delegates our districts have elected this year, because they felt it to be their duty publicly to declare that the above-mentioned doctrine is Calvinizing.³⁴⁹

On November 16, 1881, nine former Missouri synod pastors, two teachers, four congregational delegates and a number of guests and visitors met in Blue Island, Illinois, to organize and unite with the Ohio Synod as a district of that synod. The majority of the meeting time was given to the discussion of five theses on election drawn up by Pastor H. A. Allwardt and Pastor H. Ernst. The theses became known as the “Blue Island Theses.” The lengthy discussion was recorded and printed. An English translation was published in 1897.³⁵⁰

The Blue Island group claimed that at the heart of the controversy was the question, was the election determined by the merit of Christ as apprehended by faith or by the free pleasure of a secret will of God?³⁵¹ The doctrine of election is not a mystery because the rule by which God chose some instead of others was foreseen faith.³⁵² Election is revealed in the gospel that

³⁴⁹ *Lutheran Standard*, 39 (Sept 24, 1881), 300.

³⁵⁰ H.A. Allwardt, *et al.* “A Testimony against the False Doctrine of Predestination Recently Introduced by the Missouri Synod,” translated by R. C. H. Lenski and W. E. Tressel in *The Error of Modern Missouri: Its Inception, Development, and Refutation*. ed. by George H. Schodde. (Columbus: Lutheran Book Concern, 1897). All citations will be to this English translation. The five theses follow.

I. God has irrevocably elected unto salvation before the foundation of the world all those who are saved in time.

II. Election is revealed in the Scriptures, and is therefore no more a “mystery” than any other article of faith.

III. Election is revealed in the Gospel and not in the law.

IV. The Gospel directs us to Christ—God has elected in Christ.

V. Christ’s merit is considered in election not merely as obtained for us, but also as apprehended by us—God has elected in view of faith. *Ibid.*, 576.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 707.

³⁵² *Ibid.*, 595.

whoever believes will be saved.³⁵³ Election is based on God's foreknowledge (Romans 8:29) which must be understood in the sense that the people he foreknew were those who believed, making foreknown faith the basis for election.³⁵⁴ The "analogy of faith" confirms this understanding.

If election took place for Christ's sake just as well as the justification of a sinner took place for Christ's sake, then, as in justification, so in election, the appropriation of Christ's merit, occurring through faith, must be taken into account. As in justification the merit of Jesus Christ accepted in faith decided who should be justified, so also in eternal election the merit of Jesus Christ accepted in faith decided which persons should be saved and which should not. This follows necessarily from the analogy of faith. Thus the doctrine of election fits harmoniously into the whole body of the articles of faith. Thus there exists not the slightest contradiction between this doctrine and the fundamental doctrine of the Gospel: "Out of grace, for Christ's sake through faith." The analogy of faith demands and confirms the doctrine, that God has elected in view of faith.³⁵⁵

Allwardt and his colleagues insisted that they were teaching only two moving causes of election and that God is not moved by any merit or worthiness on man's part. They rejected the idea of free will in human beings by nature. They insisted that God must convert man and there is always the possibility of a human being willfully resisting the work of the Holy Spirit.³⁵⁶

Those who willfully despise God's Word cannot be converted. Therefore God elected all those he foresaw would not foreclose the ordinary way the Holy Spirit brings people to faith.³⁵⁷

Allwardt and the others were making a distinction between *natural* resistance and *willful* resistance. Synodical Conference theologians contended that this distinction implied some free will in human beings who were spiritually dead by nature.

Meanwhile the Wisconsin Synod was giving support to Walther primarily through the work of the synod's leading theologian, Adolf Hoenecke.³⁵⁸ Hoenecke was a university-trained

³⁵³ *Ibid.*, 673.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 720-723.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 752.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 686-688.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 667.

³⁵⁸ For biographical information on Adolf Hoenecke see August Pieper, "The Significance of Adolf Hoenecke for the Wisconsin Synod and American Lutheranism," in *The Wauwatosa Theology*. Curtis Jahn, ed. (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997) vol. III, 359ff. See also Im. P. Frey, "Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, 1863-1963," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*. vol. 60 #3 (July 1963), 201-208. For an

theologian who had studied under August Tholuck (1799-1877) at the University of Halle.

Tholuck had encouraged him to study the great Lutheran dogmaticians of the age of orthodoxy.

Hoenecke arrived in the United States in February of 1863 and became a pastor in the Wisconsin Synod. He soon came to the fore as the theological leader of the synod when he was called to Wisconsin's seminary in 1865 and assumed the duties of editor-in-chief of the *Gemeinde-Blatt*, the Wisconsin Synod's periodical. Already in the early 1870s at a pastoral conference of the Western District of the Missouri Synod Hoenecke opposed Stelthorn's understanding of conversion because Stelthorn denied divine monergism. Hoenecke was a guest at the conference but took the lead in the opposition to Stelthorn, literally backing the latter up against the wall of the church.³⁵⁹ Hoenecke also wrote articles on conversion for the *Gemeinde-Blatt* in 1877 and 1878.³⁶⁰

As the controversy intensified, Wisconsin's pastoral conference in 1879 raised some objections to certain statements of Walther that appeared to be extreme. The conference asked Walther to explain or clarify.³⁶¹ Koehler reports that Walther offered clarifications at Missouri's pastoral conference in 1880. President Bading and Professor Ernst of the Wisconsin Synod were in attendance.³⁶² Walther subsequently corrected these statements in print.³⁶³ Hoenecke wrote a brief article on election to clarify matters for pastors and laity of his synod. In the article Hoenecke stated that in considering this doctrine one must hold his reason captive to God's

overview of Hoenecke's role in the election controversy see Jonathan Schroeder, "The Contribution of Adolf Hoenecke to the Election Controversy of the Synodical Conference and an Appendix of Translated Articles," *WELS Historical Institute Journal*, 17 (October 1999), 14-41.

³⁵⁹ Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 158.

³⁶⁰ "Was kann ich zu meiner Bekehrung bei tragen oder wie werde ich bekehr?" *Gemeinde-Blatt*, 13 (Nov 1, 1877), 1. "Wenn Gott allein die Menschen bekehren kann und musz und solches thut ohne des Menschen Zuthun, woher kommt es denn, dasz so viele Menschen unbekehrt bleiben?" *Gemeinde-Blatt*, 14 (Jan 1, 1878), 1.

³⁶¹ Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 158-159. *Moving Frontiers*, ed. by Carl Meyer (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), 273-274.

³⁶² Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 58. According to Koehler, Walther remarked to Bading 'half-humorously,' "You put me on the spot right in front of my cohorts."

³⁶³ Walther's correction is entitled, "*Sententiam teneat, linguam corrigan*," *Lehre und Wehre*, 37 (15 February 1881). He corrected his language in three areas: that there are no conditions in God; that those who are lost perish because their perdition is foreseen by God; that the elect receive a richer grace. See Schroeder, 19.

Word. The Bible teaches both universal grace and God's will to save all, and a particular election. On the basis of human reason God appears to be unjust in Scripture's teaching of a particular election.

Even in the Lutheran Church, which has always held to the principle: "Scripture is to be explained with Scripture," men who are unfaithful to this principle in the doctrine of predestination have quickly erred. This is because they feel they must justify the holy and righteous God in his unknowable counsel and actions. However, God needs no such justification. He is always just, even if he appears to us to be unjust. He overcomes when he is judged. (Rom. 3:4)

In view of this, if we want to consider the doctrine of predestination in a fruitful way, then we must beat down all our thoughts and all the conclusions of our reason which contend against the Word of God. We must cling only to the revealed Word of God. The only one who will derive true blessings and comfort from this doctrine, is the one who falls with a believing heart in true reverence before God and his Word in the Scriptures—the one who, full of confidence through faith in the Word of God, can lift up his heart and can say: "Speak, Lord, Your servant is listening."³⁶⁴

A later colleague of Hoenecke at Wisconsin's seminary reveals this insight into Hoenecke's attitude during the controversy.

Privately he (i.e., Hoenecke) declared: Walther's teaching is not Walther's, but the teaching of the Scriptures, of Paul, of Luther, and of the Formula of Concord. The second way (*tropos*) of presenting the doctrine (i.e., election *intuitu fidei*), however, is a dogmatic derailment. Walther, in his zeal, let slip several sentences that said too much, and they will have to be set straight. But Walther stands directly on Scripture, and his opponents are mired in reason. With him we stand on Scripture. Several Missourians are hard to bear, but on the score of theology we are of one flesh and blood with Walther. Therefore there can be no talk of separating from Missouri. He persuaded Walther to make a public correction of his dubious sentences, and he kept our synod on the right track, although a small number of men—they were never really one with us—deserted us. Humanly speaking, our synod might well have been torn apart if Hoenecke's theology—not outwardly dazzling, but strong because it was Lutheran to the core—had not held us together.³⁶⁵

At the colloquy in Milwaukee in January 1881 it was evident that Wisconsin stood with Walther. Walther publicly expressed his appreciation for the Wisconsin Synod's support in *Der Lutheraner*. Walther wrote, "Praise God! We Missourians do not stand in this fight alone! The Wisconsin Synod, in the theologians of its faculty and in its many able members, stands at our

³⁶⁴ Hoenecke, "Zur Lehre von der Gnadenwahl," *Gemeinde-Blatt* 15 (Apr 15, 1880), 121-122. An English translation – Schroeder, *WELS Historical Institute Journal* 17 (October 1999), 28-31.

³⁶⁵ August Pieper, "The Significance of Adolf Hoenecke for the Wisconsin Synod and American Lutheranism," in *The Wauwatosa Theology*. vol. III, 417-418.

side.”³⁶⁶ Nevertheless Wisconsin’s leadership apparently recognized that not every pastor and congregation had yet had the opportunity to think through the issues in the controversy. In 1881 the synod in convention instructed its delegates,

that in the case the doctrinal controversy that has broken out within the Synodical Conference, at the organization or in the course of deliberations threatens to hinder its organization or further existence, they are to consider their mandate as terminated; but that the withdrawal of our delegates in such a case will by no means signify the withdrawal of our Synod from the Synodical Conference or a decision in regard to the doctrine.³⁶⁷

The Synodical Conference ultimately did not meet in 1881 because of the illness and death of Synodical Conference president Lehmann (Ohio Synod) in 1880. Vice-president Larsen of the Norwegian Synod was not present for the opening of the convention in 1882 because he was just returning from a trip to Norway. The convention was called to order by Pastor A. C. Frank, the Conference secretary. Pastor John Bading of the Wisconsin Synod was elected president. Bading served as president of the Synodical Conference until 1912.³⁶⁸

Undoubtedly to help the synod’s pastors to think through the doctrine in dispute the Wisconsin Synod’s pastoral conference in October 1881 focused on the doctrine of election. Hoenecke was the essayist. Unfortunately the conference proceedings have been lost. According to the *Lutheran Standard* and *Kirchliche Zeitschrift*, Hoenecke presented the doctrine on the basis of these two theses:

1. Just as Scripture teaches a general gracious will of God for the salvation of all men, so also it certainly teaches God’s special election of individuals to salvation.
2. The eternal election of God is the cause of faith in the elect. However, election did not happen in view of the faith of the elect.³⁶⁹

Hoenecke evidently presented the doctrine in a simple fashion without trying to resolve what appears to be a contradiction to human reason. The essay prompted vigorous discussion.

³⁶⁶ Walther, “Das Colloquium,” *Der Lutheraner*, 37 (Jan 1881), 1.

³⁶⁷ Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 159.

³⁶⁸ Schuetze, *The Synodical Conference*, 106.

³⁶⁹ Quoted by Gottfried Fritschel, “Zur Chronik des Prädestinariensstreites,” *Kirchliche Zeitschrift*, (1881) 183. Translation by Schroeder, “The Contribution of Adolf Hoenecke to the Election Controversy of the Synodical Conference.” 19.

Ohio and Iowa Synod periodicals seemed to imply that there was “neither closure nor consensus on the doctrine of election.” The Wisconsin Synod’s *Gemeinde-Blatt* indicated that the essay was received with joy.³⁷⁰

Although Hoenecke and the Wisconsin Synod sided with Walther and the Missouri Synod, the synod did not take an official stand until the synod convention in June 1882. The Wisconsin and Minnesota synods were meeting separately in LaCrosse but came together for a plenary session to discuss the doctrinal issues of the day. Professor August Graebner presented an essay on the doctrine of conversion, a doctrine also at issue in the controversy. Graebner’s second thesis concerned the cause of conversion. At that point in Graebner’s presentation Hoenecke was asked to give a brief presentation on election. Hoenecke rejected the Calvinistic teachings of limited atonement and election without regard for Christ and his merit. He explained that Scripture teaches that God wants all men to be saved, that he has had mercy on all and calls all earnestly and sincerely through the means of grace which are always powerful and efficacious. Nevertheless he has elected only certain people for salvation.

One may ask: Can you make sense of that for yourself?—What then?—God wants to save all, but again: He has elected only a few who alone are saved?—No I can’t make sense of that for myself. However, has God revealed his truth to us so that we should make sense of it for ourselves? No exactly the opposite, we believe it as he has revealed it to us.³⁷¹

Hoenecke carefully avoided some of the overstatements Walther had made in trying to explain this difficult doctrine and was willing to let apparently contradictory teachings in Scripture stand side by side without trying to harmonize them. He allowed the mystery of why some are saved and not others to remain in the unfathomable depths of God’s hidden will. A spokesman for the Minnesota Synod basically seconded Hoenecke’s presentation.³⁷²

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 19.

³⁷¹ *Wisconsin Synod Proceedings, 1882*, 33-34. English translation by Schroeder, “The Contribution of Adolf Hoenecke to the Election Controversy of the Synodical Conference,” 22.

³⁷² For Graebner’s theses, Hoenecke’s presentation, and subsequent discussion see *Wisconsin Synod Proceedings, 1882*, 13-63.

That afternoon in a joint session a vote was taken to determine agreement or disagreement with what had been presented. Two Wisconsin Synod pastors, one teacher, and one congregational delegate registered negative votes. Three Minnesota Synod pastors did likewise.³⁷³ By this vote both synods publicly declared their support for Missouri's teaching and their rejection of election *intuitu fidei*. The Minnesota Synod lost one congregation and suffered a split in another. Three congregations left the Wisconsin Synod and three other congregations suffered splits.³⁷⁴

One such congregational split resulted in Wisconsin's protest against Schmidt being seated as a delegate at the Synodical Conference convention in 1882.³⁷⁵ Apparently Schmidt and Allwardt were agitating against Walther and Hoenecke's teaching of election in the Wisconsin Synod's Peace Congregation in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, while the congregation's pastor was attending the La Crosse convention. Pastor Christoph Dowidat returned to find his congregation in turmoil. Subsequently the congregation invited Schmidt, Allwardt and eventually Stelhorn to be present at congregational meetings during which the doctrine was to be discussed. Pastor Dowidat invited Graebner and Bading to be present at the meeting Schmidt and Allwardt attended. The congregation accused Dowidat of heresy and at a meeting chaired by Stelhorn voted to join the Ohio Synod. About one third of the congregation siding with Dowidat left Peace Congregation and founded Grace Congregation. Grace remained in the Wisconsin Synod and Dowidat was called to be the pastor of the new congregation.

Up until the 1882 Synodical Conference convention the Wisconsin Synod had refrained from making any public attacks on those who were contending for the teaching of election *intuitu fidei*. It seems that the synod's leaders hoped that they might be able to play a role of intermediary between Walther and Schmidt. The hope was that Schmidt might more readily

³⁷³ *Wisconsin Synod Proceedings, 1882*, 34-35.

³⁷⁴ Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*. 61.

³⁷⁵ The information in this paragraph is a summary of "Christoph Dowidat, Confessor and Faithful Pastor," by Mark Grubbs. Senior church history paper, 1978. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, WI. 7-13.

listen to Wisconsin representatives because they had not been his antagonists. However Schmidt's actions in the Oshkosh congregation and his accusations over against the Wisconsin Synod led the synod to join Missouri in demanding that Schmidt not be allowed to be seated as a delegate at Synodical Conference convention. Wisconsin's first step had been to protest Schmidt's actions to his own Norwegian Synod. Since the Norwegian Synod had not as yet met to respond to the charges against Schmidt, Wisconsin believed that the Synodical Conference must do what Schmidt's Synod otherwise would have done—call Schmidt to repentance.³⁷⁶

The Synodical Conference devoted ten of eleven sessions to the discussion of the doctrine of election and the question of the seating of Schmidt. Schmidt's only defender was Pastor Muus of the Norwegian Synod. The convention voted to bar Schmidt with only Pastor Muus voting against the resolution.³⁷⁷ The convention voted to recognize Missouri's Thirteen Theses adopted in 1880³⁷⁸ and the Wisconsin and Minnesota Statements adopted at their conventions in 1882.³⁷⁹ Once again only Pastor Muus voted in the negative.

In 1883 the Norwegian Synod withdrew from the Synodical Conference but remained in fellowship with the synods of the conference. The Norwegian Synod hoped that withdrawing from the Synodical Conference might make it easier to deal with Schmidt and others who agreed with him in their own synod.³⁸⁰ Subsequent developments among the Norwegians will be discussed in chapter four.

There were relatively few new developments among the other participants in the controversy. After *Altes und Neues* ceased publication about 1885 the controversy died down.

³⁷⁶ *Verhandlungen der neunten Versammlung der evangelisch-lutherische Synodal Konferenz von Nord-*

Amerika zu Chicago, Illinois, vom 4. bis 10. Oktober 1882. St. Louis: Lutherischer Concordia-Verlag, 1882, 42-43. Hereafter *Synodical Conference Proceedings*. See David Schmiel, *The History of the Relationship of the Wisconsin Synod to the Missouri Synod until 1925*. Masters Thesis, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri, June 1958. 63-65.

³⁷⁷ *Synodical Conference Proceedings, 1882.* 38, 48.

³⁷⁸ *Synodical Conference Proceedings, 1882.* 78.

³⁷⁹ *Synodical Conference Proceedings, 1882.* 64.

³⁸⁰ Schuetze, *The Synodical Conference: Ecumenical Endeavor*, 108-110.

Positions had become hardened. There were no real efforts at reconciliation. The Ohio and Iowa synods, both of which taught election in view of faith, moved closer together. In 1883 representatives of Ohio and Iowa met in Richmond, Indiana, to discuss the possibilities of fellowship. Although nothing official resulted from this meeting, it was a harbinger of things to come. In 1886 Ohio suggested holding an official colloquy between the two synods. In 1893 representatives of Iowa and Ohio met in Michigan City, Indiana, and produced the “Michigan City Theses.”³⁸¹ Subsequent union efforts resulted in the 1930 merger of the Ohio, Iowa, and Buffalo synods to form the American Lutheran Church. These developments will be discussed in a later chapter.

Theologians on both sides of the controversy continued to write articles on the various issues involved in the controversy. Although the articles rarely contained anything that was really new, they serve to crystallize the differences and shed important light on the underlying issues.

Walther, who had always been accustomed to quote frequently from various Lutheran fathers, presented an essay at the 1884 convention of the Synodical Conference entitled, “Church Fathers and Doctrine.”³⁸² The essay attempted to maintain the Lutheran *sola scriptura* principle that the Holy Scriptures are the only source of faith. Walther maintained that a faith not founded on Scripture is no faith.³⁸³ Even a simple Christian must rely on Scripture and not be dependent on his pastor in matters of faith.³⁸⁴ Obscure passages must be interpreted in the light of Scripture, not in the light of human reason. The Lutheran Confessions are not a source of doctrine. One quotes Scripture to show that his doctrine is true. One quotes the Lutheran Confessions to show

³⁸¹ Fred W. Meuser, *The Formation of the American Lutheran Church*. 73-105.

³⁸² *Synodical Conference Proceedings, 1884*. 5-75. An English translation is included in C.F.W. Walther, *Essays for the Church*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1992). vol. II, 67-101. All reference with be to this English translation.

³⁸³ *Ibid.*, 81.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 88.

that his doctrine is Lutheran.³⁸⁵ In times of controversy one must go back to Scripture. When a teaching is well known one can quote the fathers because the fathers often confirm the doctrine of Scripture much better than one can on his own.³⁸⁶ The teaching of election *intuitu fidei* is drawn from the Lutheran fathers and not from Scripture. Romans 8 says that God foreknew persons. It does not say that he foreknew faith. Those who teach election in view of faith are importing faith into this passage.³⁸⁷ Walther took issue with the way his opponents were using the expression *analogy of faith*. According to Walther, to interpret a passage of Scripture according to the analogy of faith means the explanation of that passage must not contradict other passages that treat the same article of faith. It does not mean that the explanation cannot be contrary to passages that teach other doctrines.³⁸⁸ To prove that election is in view of faith one must not quote a passage that speaks about justification, but must find a passage that says that faith is the cause of one's election.³⁸⁹ Scripture, however, speaks of faith as the effect of election, not the cause—*All who were ordained to eternal life believed* (Acts 13:48).³⁹⁰ Teachings of clear Scripture that appear to human reason to be in contradiction are not to be harmonized by human reason. Those teachings must stand whether we can harmonize them or not.³⁹¹

That same year Schmidt wrote a lengthy article entitled, "*Intuitu Fidei*."³⁹² Schmidt contended that *sola fide* and *intuitu fidei* are two different formulas to express the same thing, namely that a sinner is saved by faith alone.³⁹³ Since justification by faith is the chief article of

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 82.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 84.

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 83.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 70.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 82.

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 75.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 82.

³⁹² An English translation by R. C. H. Lenski and C. B. Ghodes is included in *The Error of Modern Missouri*. George H. Schodde, ed. (Columbus: Lutheran Book Concern, 1897), 191-555. All references will be to this English translation. An editorial note (382) indicates that this essay was written in 1884. I have not been able to determine where or when the original German version was published.

³⁹³ *Ibid.*, 193.

the Christian faith all other articles must harmonize with it.³⁹⁴ The doctrine of election must be understood in the light of the doctrine of justification by faith. Therefore the doctrine of election by way of the analogy of faith must be an election in view of faith.³⁹⁵ The controversy revolves around the expression “election *in* Christ.”³⁹⁶ Schmidt maintains that the mystery in election is solved in the individual’s use of free will.

Our fathers taught both that the call of divine grace, owing to its universal sufficiency, enabled not alone the elect but all the called to be converted and saved, and in the second place, that all the called, and not only the non-elect, can if they so choose, reject the call of grace without restraint and hindrance, and thus forfeit and lose their souls’ salvation. And since God neither saves the former by irresistible grace, nor offers the latter a kind of grace which really is insufficient, therefore, the called are confronted by the great choice, either to permit their salvation according to the universal order of salvation and by the means prescribed therein, or to reject and frustrate, in the free use of their liberty, the counsel of salvation which saving love has conceived. This being so, God, in eternity, was constrained to see and inquire beforehand what each individual called would do in time and how he would conduct himself, in order to preordain in His eternal purpose, according to His foreknowledge, who among the called should be elect. And thus it was that many were called, but few chosen.³⁹⁷

Frederick Stellhorn was a Missouri Synod pastor and theologian who taught at the Wisconsin Synod’s Northwestern College in Watertown, Wisconsin, and at Missouri’s Concordia College in Ft. Wayne, Indiana, before joining the Ohio Synod because of his opposition to Missouri’s teaching on election. He taught at the Ohio Synod’s Capital University in Columbus, Ohio, 1881-1919.

Stellhorn’s major contribution to the literature of the Election Controversy is entitled, “The Present Controversy on Predestination: A Contribution to its History and Proper Estimate.”³⁹⁸ Stellhorn begins his discussion of predestination with a brief presentation of the Greek fathers and Augustine (354-430). He uses the works of Gottfried Thomasius (1802-1875)

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 243 footnote.

³⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 413, 530, 543.

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 394 footnote.

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 560-561.

³⁹⁸ This lengthy essay was originally written in German after the break in fellowship between the Missouri and Ohio synods. No date is given, but it must have been written between 1892 and 1897 because Stellhorn quotes from a work published in Halle in 1892. The English translation by R.C.H. Lenski is included in *The Error of Modern Missouri: Its Inception, Development, and Refutation*. ed. by George H. Schodde (Columbus: Lutheran Book Concern, 1897), 3-190. All citations will be from this volume.

and Christoph Luthardt (1823-1902) to summarize the teachings of the fathers. He notes with disapproval the synergism of John of Damsacus (ca. 675-ca. 750) and the irresistible grace of Augustine.³⁹⁹ His treatment of Luther's views is sympathetic. He notes Luther's Augustinian background and Erasmus' attack on the central doctrine of the Reformation in the latter's *De Libero Arbitrio* as the reasons for Luther's strong statements in his *De Servo Arbitrio*. He claims that Luther later modified his views.⁴⁰⁰ He claims that Article XI of the Formula of Concord is teaching election in a broader sense than Walther understands.⁴⁰¹ In Stellhorn's opinion the controversy revolves around Walther's understanding of Article XI in distinction to the Lutheran theologians of the preceding 300 years.⁴⁰² Stellhorn also believes that the doctrine of election taught by "modern" Missouri is not the same doctrine previously taught by Walther and other Missouri theologians.⁴⁰³

Reactions to the Controversy outside the Synodical Conference

Some of Missouri's opponents outside of the Synodical Conference having felt the biting words of Walther over the years were bemused that he was on the receiving end in this controversy.⁴⁰⁴ An opinion issued by the Lutheran Seminary faculty in Philadelphia requested by the General Council "appeared to steer a course between the two extremes represented by C.F.W. Walther and Matthias Loy."⁴⁰⁵

The great confessional Lutheran theologian of the General Council, Charles Porterfield Krauth, in a letter dated February 13, 1880, confessed that he had not as yet read Walther's exposition of the doctrine of election. He considered the appearance of *Altes und Neues* to be "a matter of doubtful expediency" and doubted that Walther could be guilty of Crypto-Calvinism

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 3-10.

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 11-23.

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 42, 45.

⁴⁰² *Ibid.*, 123-124.

⁴⁰³ *Ibid.*, 140-175.

⁴⁰⁴ Festerling, "The Cost of Confessionalism," 10-11.

⁴⁰⁵ *Confessional Lutheran Theology in America*, 223.

because that term implied a conscious act. He thought Walther might be guilty of unconsciously approximating Calvinism in his expression. Krauth also expressed his opinion that Luther was never a “Calvinist” but perhaps Augustinian with many points of divergence from Calvinism even when he was nearest to Calvinism.⁴⁰⁶ Many continued to encourage Krauth to write on the doctrine in controversy.

After Krauth’s death a fragmentary manuscript was found among his papers. Krauth states that the disputants in the Synodical Conference needed to agree on a statement putting forth the points on which they were in agreement and the points on which they differed. Otherwise they would continue to “muddle the mind of the church” on this doctrine. Krauth claims that the question, “Is our faith a cause of God’s election or the result of it?” must be carefully defined. Considered in the relationship between God and man, the answer would be one thing, considered in relation of one man to another the answer would be the opposite.⁴⁰⁷ Krauth contends that faith is not the cause of a general or a particular election. Faith

is the cause of the difference between the man who receives the benefits of election and the man who refuses them. This faith is indeed foreseen, but by that it does not become the cause of the election; it is foreseen as an effect of the election and therefore cannot be considered as the cause . . . as a condition it is part of election and cannot therefore be the cause of the whole.⁴⁰⁸

Krauth notes that Luther and the later theologians were contending against two different opponents: Luther against Roman Catholicism, the later theologians against Calvinism.

The later divines, over against the absolutism of Calvinism, brought into prominence election as it related to the responsibility of man. In this relation election is not the cause of a difference in result, for while faith is the result of it in the believer, want of faith is not the result of it in the unbeliever. Faith is the actual condition of the application of election or its determination at this point.⁴⁰⁹

⁴⁰⁶ The letter is quoted by Adolph Spaeth, *Charles Porterfield Krauth*. Two volumes in one. (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969), vol. II, 327.

⁴⁰⁷ The article was published by Adolph Spaeth, Krauth’s son-in-law, as “The Controversy on Predestination,” *The Lutheran Church Review*. 3 (1884), 68-71 The text is printed in *Confessional Lutheran Theology in America*, 224-226. Current reference, 224.

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 226.

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 226.

The disputants in the Midwestern synods did not seem to take much notice of the publication of this brief article by the late General Council theologian.

Summary and Conclusion

In the early 19th century there was a revival of confessional Lutheranism in Europe that spread to North America. New confessional Lutheran synods came into existence in the United States as well as two Lutheran federations dedicated to confessionalism. One of these, the Synodical Conference, stressed the importance of unity in both doctrine and practice, particularly in those teachings central to the Reformation, e.g., original sin and free will as related to conversion and divine monergism and justification by faith.

Controversy over the doctrine of election broke out in the Synodical Conference when Walther rejected the expression that God has elected those who will be saved *intuitu fidei* (in view of faith). He contended that the expression *intuitu fidei* implies a third cause of election in addition to God's grace and Christ's merits. He taught that faith is the result of election and not the cause of it.

Friedrich Schmidt and others accused Walther of teaching election in a way that was a subtle form of Calvinism. Walther and his supporters accused their opponents of synergism because they taught that there was a reason in a human being why God chose him in eternity, namely his foreseen faith or his lack of wanton resistance to the Holy Spirit.

The voluminous writing on both sides began to reveal that differences in their approach to theology and the Lutheran Confessions lay behind the differences in their doctrine. Besides an exegetical disagreement on the meaning of *foreknew* in Romans 8:29, there was a more significant disagreement on how to draw doctrine from Scripture and teach it in a systematic way. Walther's opponents contended that the doctrines of Scripture were to be harmonized so that they fit together according to human reason using the analogy of faith. They believed that the doctrine of election was to be harmonized with the doctrine of justification by faith. Walther contended

that the proper understanding of the analogy of faith meant that one must draw a particular doctrine only from those passages of Scripture that teach that particular doctrine. One is to draw the teaching of election from those passages that speak about election, not from those passages that speak about justification by faith. The two sides also disagreed on their approach to the Lutheran Confessions. Walther's opponents insisted that the Formula of Concord taught election in the "wide" sense of the term including the entire order of salvation. Walther's presentation of election echoed the expression of the Formula of Concord. He also contended that it was a misuse of the Lutheran fathers to insist on an expression in their teaching that was not based on Scripture. Walther's opponents departed from Luther by denying that the doctrine of election belonged to the hidden will of God. They believed that the question of *cur alii prae aliis* was answered by the doctrine of justification by faith.

The difference in approach to theology between the two sides became the main point of contention in the first attempt to resolve the controversy in the twentieth century. That attempt will be the focus of our next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

THE FREE CONFERENCES OF THE FIRST DECADE OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw a continuation of the process of mergers among Lutheran synods in the United States. The Illinois Synod merged with the Illinois District of the Missouri Synod in 1880. The English Evangelical Lutheran Synod became the English District of the Missouri Synod in 1912.⁴¹⁰ The Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Michigan Synods joined in a federation in 1892. Not everything went smoothly during the federation years, but by 1910 issues were resolved. The problems that had developed were not doctrinal but organizational and procedural.⁴¹¹ The three synods together with the Nebraska Synod were amalgamated to form the Joint Synod of Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan, and Other States in 1917.⁴¹² In 1918 the synods of the General Council, the General Synod and the General Synod, South, joined to form the United Lutheran Church in America (ULCA). The Iowa and Ohio Synods also moved closer together, culminating in their merger with the Buffalo Synod to form the American Lutheran Church in 1930. Some of these mergers were based on agreement in doctrine and practice. Other mergers involved a willingness to join in spite of doctrinal differences.

It is not surprising that as the various mergers took place there were also new efforts to resolve the doctrinal controversy which had splintered the Synodical Conference in the late nineteenth century. The first of these efforts involved a series of free conferences in the first decade of the twentieth century. The free conferences began with high expectations. No agreements, however, could be reached because of key differences in the approach to the

⁴¹⁰ *Lutheran Cyclopedia*. ed. by Erwin L. Lueker (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1975), 403, 551. The English District of the Missouri Synod became a non-geographical district.

⁴¹¹ Edward C. Fredrich, "Haste Makes Waste in the Story of the Michigan Synod's Division," in *Michigan Memories: Things Our Fathers Have Told Us*. ed. by Forrest L. Bivens, Richard A. deRuiter, and Daniel L. Schaller (Michigan District of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1985), 215-242.

⁴¹² Edward C. Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*. 93-105, 119-131.

theological task. The differences came to a head in the expression *analogy of faith*. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss these differences

In order to understand the dynamics of these efforts to resolve the election controversy through free conference discussions, we must first consider the gradual warming of relations between the Ohio and Iowa synods. Ohio and Iowa stood together in opposition to the doctrine of election taught by the theologians of the Synodical Conference. Yet Ohio and Iowa were not yet united in their approach to theology. By 1930 Ohio and Iowa would accept each other's approach to theology.

Relations between Ohio and Iowa

The mergers involving the Missouri Synod and the Wisconsin Synod involved the amalgamation of synods that were members of the Synodical Conference⁴¹³ and were in complete doctrinal agreement. Historically there were some significant disagreements between Ohio and Iowa even though these two synods found themselves on the same side in the Election Controversy.

The Iowa Synod was founded in 1853 by pastors sent to America by Wilhelm Loehe of Neuendettelsau in Germany. Many of Loehe's emissaries were among the founding fathers of the Missouri Synod. Loehe broke relations with the Missouri Synod in 1853. Most of his emissaries remained with the Missouri Synod, but two pastors in Michigan remained in fellowship with Loehe and his missionary enterprise. The two men were Johannes Deindoerfer (1828-1907) and Georg Grossmann (1823-1897). To prevent needless conflicts among Lutherans in Michigan these two men moved to Iowa with members of their congregations and founded the Iowa Synod in 1854 at St. Sebald, Clayton County, Iowa.

Iowa differed with the Missouri Synod on the meaning of subscription to the Lutheran confessions. Missouri subscribed to the Lutheran confessions because they are in harmony with

⁴¹³ The exception is the Michigan Synod which left the General Council in 1888. It joined the Synodical Conference as part of the conditions set down by Minnesota and Wisconsin in the federation agreement.

the Holy Scriptures. Iowa distinguished between essential and nonessential doctrines in the confessions. Certain nonessential doctrines were to be considered “open questions” and disagreement on these doctrines did not preclude fellowship.⁴¹⁴ Among the “open questions” in the Lutheran confessions Iowa included the teachings on the Antichrist, the divine necessity of Sunday observance, and chiliasm.⁴¹⁵

Representatives of both the Ohio and Iowa Synods were present at the organizational meeting of the General Council in 1867 but neither became voting members of the federation. Ohio asked the General Council for clarification of its doctrinal position regarding chiliasm, altar fellowship, pulpit fellowship, and secret societies. The Iowa Synod wanted clarification on the latter three points but did not include chiliasm⁴¹⁶ because the synod considered some forms of chiliasm to be “open questions” and did not make agreement on this teaching a necessity for church fellowship. Iowa was given the right to debate at the sessions of the General Council but not the right to vote.

Iowa drew up “Theses on Church Unity” in 1867 to clarify its position on church fellowship. The final five theses express Iowa’s attitude toward doctrine and the Lutheran confessions.

Thesis V. Therefore, the unity of the church is truly a fundamental unity but not an absolute one, because it relates to the essential basic doctrines, not to less important matters.

Thesis VI. Complete unity of doctrine has never existed in the church and must not be made the condition of fellowship.

Thesis VII. Fundamental or essential doctrines, however, are not only those which are fundamental for the individual Christian, but are all those which the church has defined in its Confession.

Thesis VIII. Accordingly, the symbols contain the sum of doctrines on which doctrinal agreement is necessary.

Thesis IX. However, this does not refer to all the unessential or incidentally mentioned doctrines in the confessions, but to all articles of faith; these must be recognized as definitely defined by the church.⁴¹⁷

⁴¹⁴ Lutherans speak of being in fellowship with each other or not being in fellowship. Other branches of Christianity often speaking of being in “full communion” with each other.

⁴¹⁵ Nelson, *The Lutherans in North America*, 228.

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 235-236.

⁴¹⁷ *Documents of Lutheran Unity in America*. 209.

The Missouri Synod and the others that eventually comprised the Synodical Conference rejected the claim that there were scriptural doctrines on which there could be disagreement without it being divisive of fellowship. They also rejected the idea of essential and unessential doctrines in the Lutheran confessions.

For many years the Iowa Synod maintained a rather lonely existence in the United States. The synod would not join the General Council because the practice of the General Council was not in line with its confession. On the other hand, the synod recognized that there were doctrinal differences and differences in approach to theology and the Lutheran confessions with the member synods of the Synodical Conference, including the Ohio Synod. Iowa operated with an “historical” approach to the Lutheran confessions. Following Wilhelm Loehe whose emissaries founded the Iowa Synod, Iowa taught that doctrine is an historical development, that there was an organic development of doctrine whereby God revealed to the church greater clarity through controversy. The Synodical Conference taught that doctrine does not develop but is revealed in Scripture. Iowa held that only the doctrines in dispute in the 16th century were binding in the confessions and that other doctrines in the confessions were non-essential. The Synodical Conference theologians made no distinction between essential and non-essential doctrines in the Lutheran confessions and believed that Iowa’s approach amounted to a denial of the Lutheran confessions and, more importantly, the clarity of Scripture.⁴¹⁸

After the Ohio Synod withdrew from the Synodical Conference in 1881 there was a slow warming of relations between Ohio and Iowa. In 1882 Gottfried Fritschel of the Iowa Synod proposed a private meeting of representatives of the two synods to determine whether fellowship might be possible. The meeting took place August 8-10, 1883, in Richmond, Indiana. Fritschel presented what became known as the “Richmond Theses” as a basis for discussion. The Richmond Theses reject Missouri’s accusation that Iowa taught that only doctrines on which the

⁴¹⁸ Charles P. Arand, *Testing the Boundaries: Windows to Lutheran Identity*. 119-149. See also 87-118.

church had made a decision in past controversies are doctrines of faith and all other doctrines are open questions. However, on the subject of “open questions” Fritschel’s theses declare,

1) One of the most important and meaningful principles of the Lutheran Church is this: Agreement in the pure doctrine of the Gospel is sufficient for the true unity of the Church

6) We are also of the opinion that there are secondary matters of doctrine, which do not affect this basis of faith, on which there may be different convictions without thereby terminating agreement in the pure doctrine of the Gospel, i.e., agreement in the faith.⁴¹⁹

Because they had no authorization from their two synods the representatives of Ohio and Iowa could not take any action to establish fellowship in Richmond.⁴²⁰ However, Iowa left the meeting hopeful that fellowship might soon be established. Some in Ohio thought otherwise. Some Missourians who had joined Ohio as a result of the election controversy were still suspicious of the Iowa Synod’s approach to theology and the Lutheran confessions. Pastor Henry Allwardt’s opposition to Iowa greatly delaying the establishment of fraternal relations between the two synods.⁴²¹ Allwardt opposed Missouri’s teaching of election but he also had severe doubts about the theological approach of Iowa.

Meuser, an historian who traces the history of the merger between Iowa and Ohio (and the Buffalo Synod in 1930), explains the difference in approach to doctrine that existed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries between these two opponents of the Synodical Conference.

There was an important difference in the approach to doctrine in the two synods. Ohio was more conscious of a systematic theology, and interrelated whole of doctrine. Confronted by such as those on chiliasm, which involved difficulties of harmonization, the Ohioans appealed to this “faith as a whole” and accepted the corporate harmony, called the analogy of faith, as the highest judge of the interpretation of individual problematic passages. The more difficult might be interpreted figuratively, or they might be allowed to continue as problems, but they ought not to be given a meaning conflicting with the whole of Christian doctrine.

Iowa, on the other hand, took a much less “theological” approach to such matters. The individual passages of Scripture must be taken seriously even if at a given moment they

⁴¹⁹ See Fred W. Meuser, *The Formation of the American Lutheran Church*. 286-287. The entire Richmond Theses are printed in the appendix of this book, 285-290.

⁴²⁰ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁴²¹ *Ibid.*, 77-82.

cannot all be brought into complete systematic harmony. It was mainly the older Iowans, who had learned their eschatology at Neuendettelsau, who insisted that such “clear” passages as those last chapters of Revelation must be accepted according to their literal meaning. Realizing, however, that difficulties of interpretation and harmonization were involved, they did not insist that their interpretation was the only possible correct one. They were willing within bounds, to have such subjects be treated as “Open Questions” and not demand unanimity of interpretation as a prerequisite for fellowship.⁴²²

The eventual merger of the Ohio and Iowa Synods will be discussed in a later chapter.

Their differences in approach to doctrine and theology kept the two synods apart for some time. Eventually both approaches were accepted in the two synods. The synods of the Synodical Conference rejected both approaches. Although Synodical Conference theologians readily admitted that there could be matters of open questions in certain exegetical questions and where Scripture was silent, they denied that doctrines of Scripture could be considered open questions. They also disagreed with Ohio in that they denied that all the doctrine of Scripture could be harmonized according to human logic. As Luther taught in the sixteenth century, they held that apparent contradictions in Scripture must stand. The Synodical Conference contended that such apparent contradictions are not irrational but super-rational. God’s Word sometimes is beyond our ability to understand. Humans must simply take God at his Word and give him credit for being infinitely wiser than they.

The Midwestern Free Conferences

As the twentieth century dawned Midwestern Lutherans were ready for a new attempt at settling the election controversy of the previous century. The prime mover in this effort was Pastor M. Bunge who had moved from the Iowa Synod into the Wisconsin Synod. This new attempt involved the calling of free conferences. A free conference is a conference in which individuals participate as individuals rather than coming as official representatives of their respective church bodies. In 1902 Bunge called for a free conference to be held in Beloit,

⁴²² *Ibid.*, 93-94.

Wisconsin. Because the conference was hastily called with little prior notification,⁴²³ there was rather poor attendance and nothing was accomplished. Bunge served as chairman of the committee involved in planning the next conferences.⁴²⁴

A second effort at calling a free conference proved more successful. The committee hoped for broad participation and extended an invitation to “all Lutherans who subscribe to the Book of Concord.”⁴²⁵ Attendance was high and 203 pastors and professors from twelve synods attended.⁴²⁶ The conference was held in the auditorium of the Wisconsin Synod’s Northwestern University (College). Wisconsin had the most participants with 82. Missouri was second with 60. The eleven synods represented by the participants comprised two thirds of all Lutherans in the country with total membership of 1,800,000 communicant members in 7,350 congregations served by 4,800 pastors.⁴²⁷ The meeting was chaired by Professor August Ernst, the president of Northwestern College.⁴²⁸

An opening address expressed a lament over this controversy in the Lutheran Church and the problems the strife caused in the work of home missions. It was hoped that the conference might make strides in improving the situation.⁴²⁹

The main presenter at the conference was Dr. Franz Pieper of the Missouri Synod. He delivered an essay on the basic issues to be considered in the doctrines of conversion and election. In his essay he stressed five points. First of all, Scripture teaches that the cause of conversion and salvation is only the grace of God in Christ. Secondly, the cause of non-conversion and condemnation is the resistance and evil suppression of the working of the Holy Ghost through the Word. Third, whatever else might be said beyond this belongs to the

⁴²³ *Der Lutherische Herold*, (May 16, 1903), 3.

⁴²⁴ Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, 111.

⁴²⁵ Schuetze, *The Synodical Conference*, 180.

⁴²⁶ *Der Lutherische Herold*, (May 16, 1903), 3. The eleven synods were the Missouri Synod (German), Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan, Missouri (English), Ohio, Iowa, Buffalo, Buffalo, Michigan (Independent), the Norwegian Synod, and the New York Ministerium. See *The Lutheran Witness* (May 21, 1903) 85.

⁴²⁷ *Der Lutherische Herold*, (May 16, 1903), 3.

⁴²⁸ *The Lutheran Witness*, (May 21, 1903), 85.

⁴²⁹ *Der Lutherische Herold*, (May 16, 1903), 3.

incomprehensible judgment and the ways of God that cannot and should not be investigated. One should not speak as if some people are in a better condition or do not resist God's grace in the same degree. The guilt of the sinful nature of man as the cause of being lost is not to be placed in opposition to the grace of God as if God did not earnestly want all men to be saved, because Scripture most clearly teaches the general grace of God and the earnest working of the Holy Spirit in all who hear the Word. Fourth, since according to Scripture God's grace is general and all men lie in the same completely ruined condition, there is here on earth no logical answer to why all men are not converted and saved or why among men one person before another is converted and saved. To answer the question on the basis of human logic one will either deny the general grace of God or place a cause of salvation in man. In the fifth place, we cannot let the fact that the gospel has not reached all peoples and every single person cause us to doubt the gracious will of God or to propose contrary wills in God. With the Formula of Concord we must recognize at this point an unsolvable mystery in this life. In eternity we will understand this mystery.⁴³⁰

An independent account reported that Pieper declared "that he has never taught an absolute predestination but an election to blessedness, which is bound with and dependent on the way of salvation." He also said, "No one should say, 'If I am chosen, then I will come to faith and be saved,' rather much more thus: "because I am baptized, hear God's Word, stand in repentance, and am confident of the merit of my Savior, that is why I know that I am chosen.'" He regretted some of the expressions and comparisons that had been used in the controversy and stated that Missouri had long ago taken certain of these back publicly. He also stated that Missouri did not consider Walther infallible.⁴³¹

After the conference the prevailing mood of the participants and outside observers was quite hopeful. In the aftermath the New York *Independent* described the conference as "a religious convention that promises to be the beginning of one of the greatest church union or

⁴³⁰ *Der Lutheraner*, (May 12, 1903), 150-151.

⁴³¹ *Der Lutherische Herold*, (May 16, 1903), 3.

federation projects in the history of American Protestantism.”⁴³² Missouri’s official English paper reported, “The outcome was a feeling which permeated the whole assembly that a step has been made toward unity and that the best of results may be expected if the discussions are continued, and carried on in the same spirit in which the sessions in Watertown were ended.”⁴³³ Franz Pieper also expressed eager anticipation of a next conference to be held in the fall of the year.⁴³⁴ Pastor Henry Allwardt, a former Missourian, is reported to have said that if Missouri had always spoken in this way, he never would have left or taken up the fight. Iowa’s George Fritschel, the son of Gottfried Fritschel, stated that so far as he knew the members of the Iowa Synod in attendance were perfectly satisfied with the presentation by Pieper.⁴³⁵

Professor J.P. Koehler of the Wisconsin Synod’s seminary in Wauwatosa writing several years later remembered a point which he raised toward the end of the second day of the conference. Pastor Doermann of the Ohio Synod used the term *analogy of faith*. This term had come up in the election controversy of the nineteenth century and had been understood in a variety of ways. According to Koehler, Franz Pieper in the Watertown discussion briefly addressed the issue by saying that the doctrine of justification was the analogy of faith and that all Lutheran teaching of Scripture must be in accord with that doctrine. Koehler immediately suggested that the analogy of faith as a hermeneutical principle should be discussed at the next conference before addressing the differences in the doctrine of election.⁴³⁶

A committee of eleven was formed to draw up plans for the next free conference to be held in either Chicago or Milwaukee.

Some seven hundred participants from eleven synods gathered in Lincoln Hall in Milwaukee in September with the hope of making further progress. Approximately five hundred pastors and professors registered by name and the synod to which they belonged. There were

⁴³² Quoted in the *Lutheran Standard*, (May 23, 1903), 331.

⁴³³ *The Lutheran Witness*, (May 21, 1903), 85.

⁴³⁴ *Der Lutheraner*, (May 12, 1903), 151.

⁴³⁵ *Der Lutherische Herold*, (May 16, 1903) 3.

⁴³⁶ Koehler, *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 241.

also visitors from other Lutheran groups including Dr. Juergen L. Neve (1865-1943) of the General Synod's Western Theological Seminary. Neve offered a fairly detailed account of the proceedings in two issues of *The Lutheran Observer*.

Koehler's suggestion to discuss the hermeneutical principle called the analogy of faith was not followed. Instead Pastor Allwardt of the Ohio Synod presented an exegesis of certain passages, especially Matthew 22:1-14. He offered this parable as proof of election *intuitu fidei*. Franz Pieper and Adolph Hoenecke said that the doctrine of election must be learned from passages like Ephesians 1:1-6 and 2 Thessalonians 2:13 which speak directly of election.⁴³⁷ In the course of the discussion it became apparent that it would have been wise to follow Koehler's suggestion.⁴³⁸ Allwardt said that he would never agree with any interpretation of any passage of Scripture speaking about a special election of God that was not in harmony with the analogy of faith. Wisconsin's Professor August Pieper (1857-1946), the younger brother of Franz, forcefully disagreed with such an approach that accepts a statement of Scripture only in so far as one with his reason could see it in harmony with the analogy of faith. Missouri's Franz Pieper said that the analogy of faith is something objective and not a theologian's speculations about the connections between biblical doctrines. Allwardt meanwhile insisted that one could not accept any teaching of a special election that contradicted the gospel declared in John 3:16.⁴³⁹

J.P. Koehler recalled that Wisconsin's Adolph Hoenecke understood the analogy of faith differently from Missouri's Pieper. He viewed faith in Romans 12:6 to be the *fides qua creditur* not the *fides quae creditur*. In his *History of the Wisconsin Synod* Koehler summarizes Hoenecke's comments.

Theological procedure in establishing Scriptural doctrine starts out with assembling all the passages that expressly deal with a certain doctrine. These are arranged according to the essential elements of teaching, as they appear in the Scriptural statements. Next is the study of this detail according to the wording of the Scriptures. The wording comprises the meaning of the individual words according to their etymology and usage in the

⁴³⁷ J. L. Neve, "The International Conference at Milwaukee." *The Lutheran Observer* (October 23, 1903), 4.

⁴³⁸ *The Lutheran Witness*, (September 24, 1903), 157.

⁴³⁹ Neve, *The Lutheran Observer* (October 23, 1903), 3.

particular context. After these details have been established, they are assembled; and then it will appear that, again and again, there are such utterances of the Spirit that remain paradoxical to our human reason or that we cannot adequately express. For the doctrine deals with the divine, eternal truths of salvation that on practically every count is beyond our comprehension and human concepts. And in want of the conception, our expression and language is likewise lame, so Scripture itself time and again resorts to figurative and parabolic speech. The dogmatist's business then is not to try to reconcile the Scriptural truth to our human mind and make it plausible; that is the way of rationalism. For that reason Paul in Rom. 12 addresses himself to faith that is wrought by the Holy Ghost. Faith can grasp what our human mind rejects, which also remains a mystery because of the individual differences of mental and spiritual make-up.⁴⁴⁰

Neve offered this insightful explanation of the difference in approach to theology between the theologians of the Synodical Conference and the theologians of Ohio and Iowa.

The difference between the two sides, it seemed to me, was this: Ohio understood by the analogy of faith the systematic connection (*nexus*) of the clear passages of Scripture and insists that the passages on special election be interpreted so as to be in harmony with that system of doctrine. Missouri denies that the analogy of faith is the biblical doctrines in their *systematic relation*; to say that the harmony between two doctrines must *necessarily be seen* leads to modern theology. The disagreement on this point was very unfortunate. The conference had assembled this time in order to treat exegetically all passages of Scripture bearing on predestination, and now they could not agree on principles of interpretation. When Missourians thought that they had proved that in certain passages special election was taught in their sense, then the Ohioans declared: This does not agree with the analogy of faith, such interpretation does away with the gospel, with the clear doctrine that all are elected for salvation.⁴⁴¹

A stalemate was quickly developing. This basic difference in the understanding of the theologian's task and hermeneutical principles meant that consensus could not be reached.

The discussion was heated but the participants made an effort to remain cordial. When asked by a member of the Iowa Synod to give his opinion concerning those who held to election *intuitu fidei*, Franz Pieper responded that the expression *in view of faith* should not be used because it was misleading and had no foundation in Scripture. Yet he would not call anyone a synergist who used this term without false notions connected to it and who was sound in his doctrine of conversion. Professor Stelhorn of Ohio was asked to state his understanding of the theologian's task in interpreting Scripture and he promised to do so in writing. The participants chose Detroit as the location of their next meeting to be convened on the Wednesday after Easter.

⁴⁴⁰ Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 243.

⁴⁴¹ Neve, *The Lutheran Observer*, (October 23, 1903), 3.

The Lutheran Witness reported that there was joy in the faces of all as the resolution passed to meet again in 1904. Evidently enough progress had been made in defining issues and understanding the various positions that there was hope for continued progress in the future.⁴⁴²

Ohio wanted the next discussion to be based on the Formula of Concord. The Synodical Conference wanted to settle the dispute concerning the meaning of passages that deal with special election. The greater number of Synodical Conference participants were able to outvote the others. Neve rightly concluded that from a human point of view there was not much hope of perfect agreement between the two sides because their theological approach was different.

There are two absolutely different “*Richtungen*” opposing each other, and of this difference in the way of treating theological subjects the difference in the doctrine of predestination is only a symptom. Even if they should come to an agreement in regard to the terms to be used in order to express the biblical meaning of election the fundamental difference between the two sides would not be extinguished. I had always believed that, except on the question of predestination, the Ohioans were practically Missourians, but that I have been mistaken in this I discovered at the conference in Milwaukee. Both represent two fundamentally different *Richtungen*. This was illustrated at Milwaukee by the following little occurrence: Dr. Shellhorn (*sic*) declared in the course of a speech that the exegete must have the right to draw consequences and to form conclusions, and he as a theologian considered it his calling to harmonize the single passages of Scripture and to bring them into a system. He expressly guarded against the supposition that he meant by it the development of a system out of one principle (as does Frank). But this dictum just frightened his opponents, and a motion was made to put it on record. The main difficulty (*sic*), therefore, is not the disagreement in the doctrine of predestination in itself, but is the fundamentally different way of doing theological work, out of which the disagreement on election is the result.⁴⁴³

Since it had been decided to hold another conference, a committee was appointed to come up with a proposal that might serve as a basis of discussion. The committee met in Chicago the week after Christmas in 1904 but was not able to agree on theses to be discussed. The committee also apparently met a few days before the convening of the conference in Detroit. On

⁴⁴² *The Lutheran Witness*, (September 24, 1903), 157-158.

⁴⁴³ Neve, “The International Conference at Milwaukee: Conclusion.” *The Lutheran Observer*, (October 30, 1903), 3.

behalf of the committee Adolph Hoenecke suggested that speakers could address two questions.

1. What is the analogy of faith? 2. How is this analogy to be used?⁴⁴⁴

Attendance was down somewhat from the attendance in Milwaukee. Fully 310 ministers registered.⁴⁴⁵ The main spokesmen were the leading theologians from each synod, many of whom had been involved in the controversy in the nineteenth century.⁴⁴⁶ Three issues came to the fore, all of which involved the method of interpretation or approach to theology. The first issue revolved around the expression *analogy of faith* and its use in drawing doctrine from the Scriptures. The second was closely related to the first. What did the Ohio and Iowa Synods mean by the expression *Schriftganze* (the entirety of Scripture or the aggregate of Scripture)?⁴⁴⁷ The third involved the role of the Lutheran confessions in this controversy.

The Lutheran Witness reported that Franz Pieper explained the understanding of the Synodical Conference of the expression *analogy of faith* in this way:

By the analogy of faith we mean the clear Word of Holy Writ. As regards any particular doctrine we find the clear Word in those passages of Scripture which treat expressly of the doctrine under consideration. The relationship between various doctrines is not to be determined by men, but again by the Scriptures alone, inasfar as it is there revealed. Passages that explain one doctrine must not be dragged in to explain other doctrines.⁴⁴⁸

The Ohio/Iowa spokesmen countered by contending that the exegesis of any passage must be compared with the analogy of faith or *schriftganze* (the entirety of Scripture or aggregate

⁴⁴⁴ *Der Lutherische Herald*, (April 30, 1904), 2. See also Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*. 243. Koehler mentions the following as meeting in Chicago: Max Fritschel and Michael Reu of Iowa, Franz Pieper and George Stoeckhardt of Missouri, Doermann and Henry Allwardt of Ohio, and Adolph Hoenecke and August Pieper of Wisconsin. Koehler attended the meeting as a guest.

⁴⁴⁵ Neve, "The Inter-Synodical Conference of Detroit." *The Lutheran Observer*, (June 3, 1904), 3. Neve lists the following from each synod or group: 143 from the Synodical Conference, 94 from the Ohio synod, 28 from the Iowa Synod, 23 from the Michigan Synod, 4 from the Buffalo Synod, 10 from the General Council, 5 from the General Synod, 2 from the Norwegian Synod, and 1 from the United Norwegian Synod.

⁴⁴⁶ F.W. Stelhorn. "Free Intersynodical Conference Convened at Detroit, Mich., April 6,7 and 8, 1904." *Lutheran Standard*, (April 16, 1904), 242. Stelhorn lists the following spokesmen: Drs. F. Pieper and G. Stoeckhardt of the Missouri Synod; Dr. A. Honecke and Prof. A. Pieper of the Wisconsin Synod; Dr. F. Richter and Profs. M. Fritschel and M. Reu of the Iowa Synod; Prof. F. Beer of the Michigan Synod; Dr. F.A. Schmidt of the United Norwegian Synod; Dr. H.G. Stub of the Norwegian Synod; Drs. H.A. Allwardt, C.H.L. Schuette and F.W. Stelhorn of the Ohio Synod.

⁴⁴⁷ Neve, "The Inter-Synodical Conference of Detroit." *The Lutheran Observer*, (June 3, 1904), 3-4.

⁴⁴⁸ *The Lutheran Witness*, (May 5, 1904), 77.

of Scripture). When asked what was meant by the entirety of Scripture, Ohio stated “The chief principles of the order of salvation; the Apostles’ Creed; somewhat amplified, the Smaller Catechism; and, still more comprehensively, all the confessions of the church.”⁴⁴⁹ Stellhorn replied that Christian doctrine forms “a harmonious whole or system, recognizable to the Christian, particularly to the theologian.” This doctrinal system is derived from the perfectly clear passages of Scripture. He went on to claim, “This organic whole constitutes the highest norm of interpretation, and is more important than even the parallelism or comparison of passages that deal with the same doctrine.”⁴⁵⁰ When the Synodical Conference representatives pressed the point by saying that an entirety consists of parts and can only be thought of as one doctrine after another, F. Schmidt of the United Norwegian Synod, whose challenge of Walther had started the Election Controversy and who was appearing at the free conferences for the first time, explained,

All articles of faith have a two-fold side: on the one hand, they express a *particular* and characteristic doctrine, so that they contain just this individual truth and no other; but, on the other hand, they also contain a *general* truth which lies at the basis of all articles of faith, and is shared by and with all other passages, just as one and the same blood pulsates through the different members of the human body. This general truth is the gospel pervading the whole Bible.⁴⁵¹

Wisconsin’s *Theologische Quartalschrift* reported that Schmidt also stated that God gave man the ability to reason so that he might harmonize contradictory statements in Scripture. In fact, Schmidt claimed that such harmonization was the theologian’s responsibility.⁴⁵²

Neither side was willing to give up what was considered a key hermeneutical principle which guided their approach to doctrine and theology. Professor Beer of the Michigan Synod’s seminary in Saginaw, however, believed that the two parties might be closer than they thought.⁴⁵³ He suggested that statements by Missouri’s Franz Pieper might serve as a basis for agreement.

⁴⁴⁹ *The Lutheran Observer*, (June 3, 1904), 4

⁴⁵⁰ F. R(ichter), "Die Intersynodale Konferenz." *Kirchen-Blatt*, 47 (April 30, 1904), 111.

⁴⁵¹ *The Lutheran Observer*, (June 3, 1904), 4

⁴⁵² *Theologische Quartalschrift*, (July 1904), 175. See also Schuetze, *Synodical Conference: Ecumenical Endeavor*, 183.

⁴⁵³ "Die Intersynodale Konferenz in Detroit." *Der Lutherische Herold*, (April 30, 1904), 3.

At the Watertown meeting in 1903 Franz Pieper had said that the analogy of faith was the doctrine of justification and that all teaching has to be in conformity with that one doctrine.⁴⁵⁴ In January 1904 Pieper had published an article in Missouri's *Lehre und Wehre* in which he explained his position more fully. He concluded his article with a summary in twelve theses. He wrote that the term analogy or rule of faith meant clear Scripture itself. The teachings of Scripture must be drawn from the clear Scripture passages which teach that doctrine. Those clear passages are known as the *sedes doctrinae*. Any teaching that is not taken from the passages of Scripture that explicitly teach that doctrine is not scriptural doctrine but human thoughts. There can be no contradiction between teachings thus drawn from Scripture because Scripture in all its words is God's Word which cannot contradict itself. The harmony between these doctrines is not to be constructed by the theologian by looking away from Scripture but is to be drawn from Scripture in so far as it is revealed. The doctrine of justification by grace through faith is the scope and brief essence of the entire Scripture. Therefore every doctrine that militates against the article of justification is wrong and upon closer testing shows itself to be a perversion of the words of Scripture. Other doctrines, however, are not to be drawn from the article on justification but solely from the passages of Scripture that treat those doctrines. "The analogy of faith correctly used is not a watchman for Scripture, but for interpreters, who are inclined to drag their own thoughts into dark passages, and even sometimes into clear passages."⁴⁵⁵

A committee met to determine whether Pieper's theses might serve as a basis for agreement. The next morning they reported that they had not reached agreement but the Synodical Conference representatives stated that the position of the Ohio Synod "was a healthier and more accurate one, than they had held up until now."⁴⁵⁶

⁴⁵⁴ Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 241.

⁴⁵⁵ Franz Pieper, "Gebrauch und Miszgebrauch der Analogie des Glaubens," *Lehre und Wehre*, 50 (January 1904), 26-27. The entire article runs from page 20-27.

⁴⁵⁶ "Die Intersynodale Konferenz in Detroit." *Der Lutherische Herold*, (May 7, 1904), 3.

There were those who noted that Pieper made no mention of justification in his statements about the analogy of faith in Detroit.⁴⁵⁷ Pieper had evidently discarded the explanation he had given at the Milwaukee Conference..⁴⁵⁸

Toward the end of the proceedings a debate once again arose over how to proceed. Representatives of Iowa and Ohio wanted to continue discussions on the basis of Article XI of the Formula of Concord. The representatives of the Synodical Conference insisted that any discussion of doctrine must be based on Scripture because the confessions ought to be expounded through the Scriptures, not *vice versa*. The two parties were not agreed on their approach to the Lutheran Confessions and the role the confessions play in resolving doctrinal disputes. Once again Professor J.L. Neve, an observer from the General Synod, concluded that both sides were guided by truly religious principles, but because of two absolutely different tendencies (*Richtungen*) it was unlikely that the two groups would be able to resolve their doctrinal differences any time soon.⁴⁵⁹

Others expressed some hope for the future. Stellhorn reported that those present fervently desired agreement in all the contested points and reacted enthusiastically whenever anyone alluded to such a possibility. Stellhorn, however, recognized that the desire for unity was fraught with danger. His warning would prove prophetic later on in some Lutheran mergers in the twentieth century.

Laudable as this sentiment certainly is—and who does not join it?—the danger connected with it is that the differences really existing may be minimized to such an extent that divine truth is sacrificed for the sake of an external peace and union. On the other hand, of course, the existing differences should not be exaggerated so as to preclude the possibility of final agreement.⁴⁶⁰

⁴⁵⁷ "Die Intersynodale Konferenz in Detroit." *Der Lutherische Herold*, (April 30, 1904), 2.

⁴⁵⁸ Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 244.

⁴⁵⁹ J.L. Neve, "The Intersynodical Conference of Detroit," *The Lutheran Observer*, (June 10, 1904), 738-739.

⁴⁶⁰ F.W. Stellhorn, "Free Intersynodical Conference, Convened at Detroit, Mich., April 6, 7 and 8, 1904," *Lutheran Standard*, (April 10, 1904), 242.

The different approach to doctrine and practice between the two sides came to the fore in another development at the end of the conference. Because the two sides were not in fellowship with each other the conferences had not been opened with joint prayer. An Ohio Synod spokesman made a motion that future conferences include such joint prayer. The motion failed when the Synodical Conference representatives explained that for them joint prayer was an act of fellowship, the same as exchanging pulpits or joint celebrations of the Lord's Supper. To join in such activities would give the false impression that there were no doctrinal differences between the two sides and that they were one in faith and spirit. Franz Pieper explained, "Ohio has withdrawn from church fellowship with Missouri (in 1882). Nobody would think us serious if now all at once, without unity of doctrine being restored, we should pray together." St. Louis Seminary Professor George Stoeckhardt stated, "We are unable to do it, not from lack of love or from contempt for our opponents, but it is against our conscience. Provided only that no fraternal prayer is demanded, can we continue these conferences."⁴⁶¹

The participants believed that the conference was valuable enough that another be held the following year. They chose Ft. Wayne, Indiana, as the site.

Both before and after the Detroit conference the theological journals of both parties contained essays on the analogy of faith and its role in the theologian's task. The Wisconsin Synod's theological quarterly began publication in 1904. In consequence of the discussions in Milwaukee Professor Koehler contributed a lengthy article on the analogy of faith which ran for three issues.⁴⁶² Koehler began with an exegetical treatment of Romans 12:6 which some had pointed to as the basis for their teaching of the analogy of faith. Koehler argued that the phrase εἰς τὴν προφητείαν κατὰ τὴν ἀναλογίαν τῆς πίστεως was speaking about the *fides qua creditur* rather than the *fides quae creditur*. Koehler contended that in New Testament Greek the root

⁴⁶¹ J. L. Neve, "The Intersynodical Conference of Detroit," *The Lutheran Observer*, (June 10, 1904), 739.

⁴⁶² J.P. Koehler, "Die Analogie des Glaubens," *Theologische Quartalschrift*. 1 (Jan-Mar 1904). An English translation is included in *The Wauwatosa Theology*, ed. Curtis Jahn (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 1:221-268. All references are to this translation.

meaning of *pistis* is “the trustful grasping of the *xaris* that God offers.” The objective meaning of “doctrine of faith” is improbable. In the Middle Ages the Latin word *fides* received the objective meaning of “doctrine of faith.” With the German word *glauben* that meaning is natural.⁴⁶³ “*Pistis* is the psychological foundation for the *charism* of *propheteia*.” In this passage the sense is “if one practices prophecy, he must not allow something of his own to slip in, but must remain within the bounds that the gift of grace, his measure of faith, has set for him.”⁴⁶⁴ Koehler concluded that the passage is not offering a hermeneutical principle to be applied in exegesis. He also found no basis for the analogy of faith as a hermeneutical principle in the use of the Old Testament made by either Jesus or the apostles.⁴⁶⁵

Koehler noted that in the ancient Christian church the similar expression *regula fidei* was used against heretics. It was not a rule of interpretation but merely a statement “that only a believing Christian can interpret Scripture correctly through the illumination of the Holy Spirit. But because his faith is that of the church, most interpreters carry on their activity according to the *regula fidei*.” The expression was used against unbelievers who did not accept the Bible as the Word of God or set their reason above Scripture. “As regards hermeneutics, the lack of clearness in understanding purely linguistic matters remains, so that the sharp distinction between the analogy of faith and the clear wording cannot arise at all, because this is possible only among people who agree in regarding Scripture as the norm and foundation of doctrine.”⁴⁶⁶ Koehler readily admitted that Luther’s translation of Romans 12:6 was not accurate. But he also noted that Luther used the analogy only to explain figures of speech not to change or modify clear expression of Scripture.⁴⁶⁷ The Lutheran dogmaticians of the 17th century begin to use the analogy of faith as a dogmatic control with the emphasis on *analogy* rather than on *faith*. Koehler

⁴⁶³ *Ibid.*, 232-233.

⁴⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 236.

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 244-250.

⁴⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 254.

⁴⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 255.

saw this use of analogy as partly the symptom of and partly the decline of exegesis and evidence of a growing subjectivism and rationalizing tendency.⁴⁶⁸

Koehler claimed that the task of the Lutheran theologian was to stay with the grammatical and historical sense of Scripture and not try to force meaning into any text.⁴⁶⁹ He contended that the correct procedure in controversy would be to drop the expression *analogy of faith* for three reasons:

1. It is not found in Scripture and it involves an incorrect exegesis of Romans 12:6.
2. It is natural for it to develop along the incorrect lines of forced interpretation.
3. It causes us in controversy always to be on the defensive for the fathers and to contend with all sorts of unnecessary wrangling, instead of going boldly into Scripture itself.⁴⁷⁰

The Ohio Synod's C.C. Hein wrote from a completely different perspective. He defined *analogy of faith* as "the sum of all the principle articles of faith contained in the Scriptures, and these doctrines and articles of faith are to be found in the Scripture passages which clearly and unmistakably teach these doctrines."⁴⁷¹ He stated that the analogy of faith is contained in the Lutheran catechism which sets forth the chief doctrines of Scripture.⁴⁷² He averred that the term was used in a twofold sense to denote the "harmonious relationship of the doctrines among themselves" and as a sum of all the articles of faith. In the latter sense it becomes the rule of faith (*regula fidei*).⁴⁷³ The theologian must use the analogy of faith when interpreting those passages that need interpreting. This provides "a safeguard against all errors."⁴⁷⁴ He claimed that Lutherans rejected Calvin's doctrine of predestination because of the analogy of faith even though Calvin's doctrine "seems to be contained in Romans and in some other passages of Scripture."⁴⁷⁵ He also cited the example of the formulators of the Formula of Concord who

⁴⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 256-258.

⁴⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 267.

⁴⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 268.

⁴⁷¹ C.C. Hein, "The Analogy of Faith." *Columbus Theological Magazine* 24, (April 1904), 74.

⁴⁷² *Ibid.*, 76.

⁴⁷³ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁴⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 78.

rejected the teaching that there is no difference between the essence of man and original sin even though certain passages teach that. The Formula of Concord rejects such an understanding of those passages because of the analogy of faith. Hein noted that the Formula does not quote a single passage of Scripture that would prove that teaching false.⁴⁷⁶

Hein claimed that the use of the analogy of faith in theology was a long-standing practice in the Lutheran Church. He believed that Missouri's false teaching concerning predestination had led to a false understanding of the analogy of faith (not vice versa) and resulted in a completely new teaching. He also believed that Missouri's teaching of predestination also resulted in false doctrine concerning conversion.⁴⁷⁷

The topic for discussion in Ft. Wayne was the exegesis of those passages of Scripture cited in the Formula of Concord's Article XI (Election). Each speaker was to be given ten minutes. The order of the speakers was at the discretion of the conference chairman.⁴⁷⁸ The participants elected the Rev. H. K. G. Doermann of Blue Island, Illinois, as chairman.⁴⁷⁹ The main speakers for the Synodical Conference were Professors Koehler (Wisconsin Synod), Stoeckhardt (Missouri), and Hoenecke (Wisconsin). The main speakers for the Ohio/Iowa position were pastors and professors Fritschel (Iowa), Allwardt (Ohio), Schmidt (United Norwegian), Appel (Ohio), Schuette (Ohio), and Stellhorn (Ohio).⁴⁸⁰ Professor Hans Stub (Norwegian Synod) spoke in favor of the Synodical Conference position. Professor Beer (Michigan Synod) and Pastor E. von Schlichten (former Missouri) took a middle position.⁴⁸¹

Before the actual discussion of the pertinent passages began, participants from the Ohio Synod voiced an official objection to a report presented by President Franz Pieper presented to a

⁴⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 79. The passages he cites as teaching no difference between the essence of a human being and original sin are John 3:6, Romans 6:6, Collosians 3:9, 1 John 3:4).

⁴⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 84.

⁴⁷⁸ *Gemeinde-Blatt*, 40, (Sep 1, 1905), 132.

⁴⁷⁹ *Lutheran Standard*, 63, (Aug 26, 1905), 530. Koehler records that Pastor Photenhauer of the Missouri Synod was elected chairman, *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 244. I have not been able to determine the reason for this discrepancy. Koehler seems to be in error.

⁴⁸⁰ *Lutheran Standard*, 63, (Aug 26, 1905), 531.

⁴⁸¹ Koehler, *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 244.

recent meeting of the Missouri Synod. The Ohio men objected to Pieper's accusation that Ohio through the principle of the *analogy of faith* taught that not only the Holy Scriptures but also human reason furnished articles of faith. They called such an approach to Scripture false teaching, declared that they had never taught such a thing, and demanded that Pieper either prove his statements or retract them. The conference did not discuss the protest but had it placed in the official minutes.⁴⁸²

Actual discussion of the pertinent passages began with the treatment of Ephesians 1:3-14 and did not go beyond that passage. There was disagreement on the meaning of *eklegesthai* (election, choosing) and the grammar of *en Christo* (in Christ). Dr. Schuette of Ohio claimed that election included the whole world.⁴⁸³ The two sides disagreed on whether *in Christ* was adverbial, modifying *chosen* or attributive, modifying *us*. The Ohio/Iowa speakers contended that to be *chosen in Christ* meant to be chosen because of faith in him since one can be *in Christ* only through faith. The Synodical Conference speakers stated that grammatically *in Christ* had to modify *chosen* and that *en Christo* meant *for Christ's sake*.⁴⁸⁴

As in the controversy in the nineteenth century, the official periodicals of the contending parties accused each other of departure from Lutheran doctrine. At the conference each side denied the accusations made by the other. Schmidt of the United Norwegian Synod said that he was opposed to the teaching of three causes in election. Hoenecke of the Wisconsin Synod stated that it was a misrepresentation to claim that the Synodical Conference men taught that there was more than one kind of grace.⁴⁸⁵

Nevertheless no progress could be made because the two sides had a difference in approach to theology and the exegetical task. The Synodical Conference speakers contended that the exegetical task involved understanding the language and grammar of a passage in its given

⁴⁸² *Lutheran Standard*, 63, (Aug 26, 1905), 530-531.

⁴⁸³ *Gemeinde-Blatt*, 40, no.17 (Sep 1, 1905), 133.

⁴⁸⁴ Koehler, *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 245-246.

⁴⁸⁵ *Lutheran Standard*, 63 no. 34 (Aug 26, 1905) 531.

context.⁴⁸⁶ Hoenecke declared that grammar is the empress.⁴⁸⁷ The account of the conference contained in Missouri's theological journal warned that if one separates his theological reflection from the text, context, language and grammar, he is in danger of falling into a notorious theological sleight of hand. It is true that the Holy Spirit must enlighten us, but he makes us certain of divine truth through the Scriptures and has inspired the sentences and words of the Scripture.⁴⁸⁸ On the other side G. Fritschel maintained "that exegesis requires: First, that we find what the Holy Spirit says. Second, that we then apply the test as this is found in the analogy of faith. Third, that we compare what we have thus found with our confession."⁴⁸⁹ Dr. Schmidt of the United Norwegians claimed that the election of a few implied the rejection of the rest. "He also stated that while 'in Christ' might not be connected with 'us' according to the rules of Greek grammar, it certainly must be connected with it theologically. Wherever Christ is offered the election is offered."⁴⁹⁰

Hoenecke recognized that the sides were going nowhere in their discussions because they had never resolved their basic differences in their approach to the theological task. He said, "We are not arriving at unity even with exegesis because our opponents from the beginning have had a different understanding of the analogy of faith."⁴⁹¹

In the course of the discussions Stelhorn of Ohio tried to resolve the deadlock by proposing that there is a difference in the individual human being that determines why one is saved and not another. He spoke of a natural resistance to the work of the Holy Spirit that is present in every human being and a willful resistance to the Holy Spirit in those who are not saved.⁴⁹² This distinction led naturally to a suggestion for a topic for discussion at the next free

⁴⁸⁶ *Lehre und Wehre*, 51, (Aug 1905), 372.

⁴⁸⁷ *Theologische Quartalschrift*, 2, (Oct 1905), 271.

⁴⁸⁸ *Lehre und Wehre*, 51, (Aug 1905), 372.

⁴⁸⁹ *Lutheran Standard*, 63, (Aug 26, 1905), 531.

⁴⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 532.

⁴⁹¹ *Theologische Quartalschrift*, 2 no. 4 (Oct 1905) 275.

⁴⁹² *Ibid.*, 275.

conference – “Whether, and to what extent, the conduct of man comes into consideration in the work of conversion.”⁴⁹³

Although there was not universal support for holding another conference, particularly among the members of the Synodical Conference, nevertheless it was resolved to schedule another. Hoenecke for one believed that to resolve the differences the discussions would have to expand to include a discussion of the doctrine of conversion.⁴⁹⁴

Declining interest in the free conferences was evident in the number who attended the second conference held in Ft. Wayne. Approximately 120 pastors, a number of teachers and laymen, as well as some 50 students from the Missouri Synod’s Concordia College in Ft. Wayne were present for the deliberations. Some of the notable theologians from the Synodical Conference (Dr. Hoenecke, Franz Pieper and August Pieper) who had participated in the past were not present. The Ohio Synod had the largest representation with some 40 pastors in attendance. The Ohio spokesmen included Dr. Stellhorn, Dr. Allwardt, Dr. Schuette, and Professor Doerman who served as chairman of the conference. There were 15 pastors from the Iowa Synod. The Iowa spokesmen were Dr. Richter and Professor George Fritschel. Dr. Schmidt from the United Norwegian Synod was present once again in support of the Ohio/Iowa position. The Synodical Conference was represented by some 30 Missouri and Wisconsin Synod pastors with Professor Koehler, Dr. Stoeckhardt, and for the first time, Professor G. Friedrich Bente (1858-1930) serving as spokesman. Professor Hans Stub of the Norwegian Synod supported the Synodical Conference position. Professor Beer of the Michigan Synod’s seminary in Saginaw and Dr. Nicum of the New York Ministerium were also in attendance. Speakers were limited to ten minutes.⁴⁹⁵

⁴⁹³ *Lehre und Wehre*, 51, (Aug 1905), 372.

⁴⁹⁴ Koehler, *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 248.

⁴⁹⁵ *Kirchen-Blatt*, 49, (Nov. 10, 1906), 365. The *Lutheran Standard* reported that Dr. Stub generally supported the Synodical Conference position and that Dr. Beer took an intermediate position though in general he seemed to side with the Ohio/Iowa position. *Lutheran Standard*, 54, (Nov. 3, 1906), 694.

The differences between the two sides quickly became obvious. The Ohio/Iowa men spoke of conversion as a *process*. They taught that there was a *natural* resistance to the Holy Spirit which God could overcome through the means of grace. Some unconverted, however, were guilty of *willful* resistance which the Holy Spirit could not overcome. Conversion, therefore, depended in part on the conduct of the individual. However, they claimed to ascribe no meritorious or effective cause to the behavior of the individual in conversion. They accused the Synodical Conference of teaching Calvinism with a two-fold grace of God and irresistible grace. Koehler, on the other hand, declared that with their approach to theology the Ohio/Iowa men were in danger of falling into the error of synergism.⁴⁹⁶

The Synodical Conference spokesmen contended that Scripture declares that natural man is utterly depraved and unable to discern or do anything spiritually good. The only thing a human being can do by nature is resist the Holy Spirit. They rejected the charge that they taught varying degrees of grace or irresistible grace by pointing to Ephesians 2 (“God who is rich in mercy made us alive in Christ when we were dead in transgressions.”). Conversion is not a process, but is instantaneous. A person is either a believer or an unbeliever. There is no intermediate state. “Not before there is faith, and be it only a spark, is there any life, and faith concerns itself with the forgiveness of sins and not with any spiritual attitude of the natural man that lends itself to regeneration.”⁴⁹⁷

In his summary of the debates Koehler claims that the discussion was unproductive because the pertinent passages of Scripture were not examined exegetically. He also states that the discussion should have stuck to one point until discussion on that point was exhausted; then the discussion should have proceeded to the next point. He complains that the confessional writings became the ground of debate instead of the Scriptures.

Koehler’s conclusion can serve as a summary of the Synodical Conference position.

⁴⁹⁶ *Kirchen-Blatt*, 49, (Nov. 10, 1906), 365-366.

⁴⁹⁷ Koehler, *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 249.

Thus the expressions *gratia irresistibilis* (irresistible grace) and ‘to act *mere passive*’ (purely passive) are misnomers that in the Latin texts of the confessional books do not have the meaning which we moderns are apt to inject into the Latin words. Grace is a sublime concept, not only because it is divine and eternal, but because it will ever elude the full grasp of our human reason. Not even when grace has conquered the heart can the believer analyze the phenomenon and make it plausible to his reason by the conception of *gratia praeveniens* (advance grace) operative before actual conversion, or by a distinction between ‘mighty’ and ‘almighty’ grace. It was illogical for the other side to speak of a passive attitude when their own definition of the attitude credited man in the state of conversion with activity. What the fathers meant with *mere passive* was to describe the state of man which excludes any cooperation on his part in conversion. The refraining from willful resistance, no matter what the explanation of that may be, cannot take place before conversion, because, according to the Scriptures, unregenerate man is dead in sins; so the refraining from resistance and regeneration or conversion are coincident or identical. And Paul is very decided about the idea of any human cooperation whatsoever, Eph. 2:9.⁴⁹⁸

The Synodical Conference believed that the Ohio-Iowa theologians were again attempting to answer with human logic the question, “Why are some saved and not others?”⁴⁹⁹ Hans Stub of the Norwegian Synod, agreeing with the Synodical Conference, stated the answer of Scripture which defies human logic, “Non-conversion has its cause in the attitude of man; conversion does not have its cause in the attitude of man.”⁵⁰⁰

When Chairman Doerman at the end of the sessions asked the question of whether to hold another conference, the participants from the Synodical Conference stated that they would not attend another conference. The motion to hold another conference, however, was called and was passed by the Ohio/Iowa majority. They believed that besides conversion, election, and the analogy of faith there were enough other matters that could be fruitfully discussed without the participation of the Synodical Conference.⁵⁰¹

The Wisconsin Synod’s *Gemeinde-Blatt* reported that nothing new had been produced at the conference that had not already been said in the course of the twenty-five year controversy. The *Gemeinde-Blatt* also opined that the questions in controversy would not be settled through debates in large assemblies in which so many speakers come forward. Seldom is a point followed

⁴⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 250.

⁴⁹⁹ Schuetze, *The Synodical Conference*, 188.

⁵⁰⁰ Koehler, *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 250.

⁵⁰¹ *Kirchen-Blatt*, 49, (Nov. 10, 1906), 366

through to the end by each side and brought to resolution. Often speakers do not take into consideration the interpretation their opponents place on their own words. The result is a disagreeable tone in the ecclesiastical periodicals that does not serve the peace of the church.⁵⁰²

Conclusion

In the first decade of the twentieth century a sincere effort was made to resolve the doctrinal difference between Midwestern Lutheran synods which had been revealed in the Election Controversy of the previous century. Even though the two sides met in five free conferences (six if one counts the lightly attended meeting in Beloit), no real progress was made.

No doubt there were many reasons for the lack of success. One historian suggests that enough of the original nineteenth century opponents were active in these efforts to make a resolution unlikely.⁵⁰³ Some might argue that large conferences with many speakers who do not carefully listen to what their opponents are saying make it difficult to make real progress. Others might fault the organizers for not insisting that a point be brought to resolution before a new point is introduced.

The overriding reason for failure, however, was the fact that the two sides had different approaches to the theological task and a different understanding of how one draws Christian doctrine from Scripture. The Ohio/Iowa representatives wanted to use something called the analogy of faith or the aggregate of Scripture (*Schriftganze*) to determine doctrine and the meaning of individual passages of Scripture. The Synodical Conference representatives claimed that a doctrine of Scripture must be determined only by examining those passages which speak of that doctrine. The theologian is to understand an individual passage by looking at the vocabulary

⁵⁰² *Gemeinde-Blatt*, 41, (Nov. 15, 1906), 170-171. The reporter may have had in mind an article that had appeared in the *Columbus Theological Magazine* by "An Ex-Missourian" which gave a caricature of Missouri's teaching. See "The Leaven of Missouri's New Dogma of Election," *Columbus Theological Magazine*, 26, (October 1906), 264-272.

⁵⁰³ Edward Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, 111. Fredrich mentions Franz Pieper, George Stoeckhardt, and Adolph Hoenecke for the Synodical Conference and Friedrich Schmidt, F. W. Stelhorn, and Henry Allwardt on the Ohio/Iowa side.

and grammar of the passage in the original languages and the given context of the passage. Since the two sides could not agree on the theological task and basic hermeneutical principles, it was impossible for them to reach agreement.

In the next chapters we will examine why subsequent attempts to resolve the Election Controversy failed. Midwestern synods began to display a desire for outward union without complete doctrinal unity.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE MADISON SETTLEMENT (OPGJØR) AND THE DRIVE TO NORWEGIAN LUTHERAN UNION

No Lutheran Synod in America suffered more as a result of the Election Controversy than did the Norwegian Synod. Approximately one third of her pastors and congregations under the leadership Friedrich Schmidt severed their relations and formed an opposition fellowship. In spite of the bitterness of the controversy many Norwegians longed for a pan Norwegian Lutheran church in America. In the first two decades of the twentieth century this desire became a reality. The pull of Norwegian culture, the weariness of doctrinal strife, and the spirit of the times brought about a union based on a compromise agreement on the doctrine of election. Instead of resolving the doctrinal differences the decision was made to allow both “forms” of the doctrine to stand. A small number of pastors and congregations rejected a merger based on a compromise agreement and formed a new synod which subsequently joined the Synodical Conference.

This chapter will demonstrate that the union efforts did not result in a resolution of the Election Controversy but in doctrinal compromise. The theological disputes among the various Norwegian synods were complicated and included conflicts over atonement, justification, the gospel, absolution, Sunday observance, lay preaching and the public ministry, as well as the doctrine of election. The conflicts were intensified by a number of conflicts over church polity and ecclesiastical practice. These disputes reflect conflicts that were already going on in Norway. We will note a number of reasons why the push for union was so strong that confessional Lutherans became willing to sacrifice doctrinal clarity. Those reasons include Norwegian ethnic pride, weariness of fighting over doctrine particularly among the laity, the process of Americanization and the production of worship materials in English, and the ecumenical spirit of the times that favored outward unity without regard to doctrinal agreement. The eventual union was achieved at the expense of glossing over the doctrinal conflict that still existed.

The Lutheran Church in Norway

To understand the dynamics of Norwegian Lutheranism in America one needs to trace the religious developments in Norway and Denmark in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. There were a number of different religious impulses, tendencies, and trends that came from these Scandinavian countries to America in the tide of Norwegian emigration to this land. It will be necessary to describe the scene in Norway before we discuss the differences among Norwegian Lutherans in America.

Lutheranism in Norway in the nineteenth century had a number of competing tendencies. Pietism had made an impact by the early eighteenth century. Because Denmark ruled Norway until 1814 religious developments in Denmark affected Norway as well. Most notably the exposition of Luther's *Small Catechism* by the Norwegian/Danish professor and bishop, Erik Pontoppidan (1698-1764), entitled *Truth unto Godliness* was as influential as it was popular. Pontoppidan's exposition was mildly pietistic and taught election *intuitu fidei*. Pontoppidan did not go into much of an explanation of the doctrine of election but merely used the expression that had become popular among the dogmaticians of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The popularity of his exposition of the *Small Catechism* served to engrain the expression in the minds of the Norwegian laity. This catechism was brought to America by Norwegian immigrants and was rather quickly translated into English.

A new pietistic awakening took place in Norway in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries through the efforts of Hans Hauge (1771-1824), the son of a farmer and champion of the working and middle class. Hauge read Luther and Pontoppidan in his youth and was familiar with some of the literature produced by the pietists in Germany. On April 5, 1796, Hauge had a profound religious experience which led him to believe that he had a call from God to arouse his fellow countrymen from their spiritual sleep. For the next several years he traversed Norway as an itinerant lay preacher. He was repeatedly arrested for violations of the Conventicle

Act which forbid itinerant lay preaching. Most of the time the authorities released him after a short imprisonment but in 1804 he was arrested and imprisoned for the next seven years. He was released in 1811 but sentenced in 1813 and 1814 for violations of the Conventicle Act. He retired on a farm near Oslo, a broken man but also somewhat of a national hero. Unlike many of the pietists in Germany, Hauge cautioned his followers against separatism from the state church. His followers developed a low church party within the Lutheran Church of Norway, emphasizing lay preaching, simple worship, obedience and sanctification rather than justification.⁵⁰⁴

In Denmark Nikolai Grundtvig (1783-1872), a university-trained Lutheran pastor, for many years was refused a parish because of his dedication to confessional Lutheranism. In 1824 Grundtvig experienced what he called his “matchless discovery” in which he determined that the Bible was the dead word of God and the Apostles Creed and the words of institution of the two Sacraments constituted the living word of God. He believed that not only the words of institution had been given by Christ to the Church but also that the words of the Apostles Creed had been given by the apostles. Since the creed and the words of institution were used in the Church from the beginning, they constituted the living word of God. This “living” Word of God could serve as the basis for church union. Grundtvig was also a nationalist who became an authority on Anglo-Saxon and Norse literature. He promoted “folk” high schools and authored many hymns. His followers became the most rationalistic of the church parties in Denmark.⁵⁰⁵

Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), philosopher and theologian, was critical of the dominant Hegelianism in Denmark and what he perceived to be empty formalism and lack of spiritual life in the Danish Lutheran Church. He believed that the clergy were guilty of making an effortless Christianity by not demanding that the whole person and his entire life be dedicated to Christ. He

⁵⁰⁴ *Encyclopedia of the Lutheran Church*. Julius Bodensieck, ed. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1965), vol. II, 988-989. See also Einar Molland, *Church Life in Norway, 1800-1950*. Harris Kaasa, trans. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1957, Greenwood Press reprint, 1978), 1-34; and, G. Everett Arden, *Four Northern Lights: Men Who Shaped Scandinavian Churches*. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1964), 51-76.

⁵⁰⁵ *The Encyclopedia of the Lutheran Church*, vol II, 964-965. See also G. Everett Arden, *Four Northern Lights*, 78-113.

was a strong opponent of rationalism but also denied the possibility of an objective system of doctrinal truths. He tied truth to the subject rather than the object, claiming that if something was true for the individual it would have an impact on his life. His stress on repentance and the necessity of Christ's redemption had an affect on some of his contemporaries, even leading a few toward confessional Lutheranism, but his influence on later generations was far more significant. Both existential philosophy and the twentieth century Protestant movement known as Neo-Orthodoxy trace their roots to Kierkegaard.⁵⁰⁶

In the mid nineteenth century Danish Lutherans who could not cooperate with the followers of Grundtvig established the Inner Mission. After 1861 this movement flourished under the leadership of Johan Vilhelm Beck (1829-1901). Beck was an orthodox Lutheran who was influenced by Kierkegaard's attack on the state church. The movement reorganized under the name, Church Society for Inner Mission. It emphasized preaching by both pastors and laymen. The purpose of the movement was to distribute Christian literature and to encourage works of charity. Indirectly, it fostered Christian mission work. The Inner Mission became the strongest of the groups in the Danish Lutheran Church.⁵⁰⁷

The Norwegians established a university at Christiana (Oslo) in 1811. Before that time most Norwegian pastors attended the University of Copenhagen. Gisle Johnson (1822-1894) exerted a strong influence on Norwegian church life through his teaching at Christiana. Johnson had studied under Adolf von Harless (1806-1879) at the University of Leipzig. He brought to Christiana a confessional Lutheran spirit that embraced Lutheran orthodoxy and that sought to awaken the spiritual life of the church in Norway. He "sought to imbue his students with a spirit of orthodoxy which blended the passion and subjectivity of a revival preacher with the intellect of

⁵⁰⁶ Samuel E. Stumpf, *Socrates to Sartre: A History of Philosophy* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1966), 455-465 and Justo I. Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), vol. III, 364-374, 434.

⁵⁰⁷ *Lutheran Encyclopedia*. ed. by Erwin L. Lueker (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1975), 231.

an orthodox systematician.”⁵⁰⁸ Many in the state church were opposed to the Haugean lay-preaching movement, but Johnson believed that in an emergency an unordained layman could preach. He worked to establish congregational rights in selecting and calling pastors and tried to establish a national church assembly to separate the administration of the church from the state. He supported the inner mission movement in Norway that aimed at evangelism, the distribution of Christian literature, missions, charitable work, etc.⁵⁰⁹ He also took an interest in the Norwegians who had emigrated to America.

Johnson’s work was augmented by Carl P. Caspari (1814-1892), a Jewish convert to Lutheranism. Caspari was an Old Testament scholar of confessional Lutheran convictions. His Lutheranism did not have the pietistic edge that could be seen in Johnson.

E. Clifford Nelson notes four important results fostered by the confessional Lutheran revival of Johnson and Caspari.

- The majority of the pastors of the Norwegian Synod and the Norwegian-Danish Conference in America received their training at the University of Christiania and brought with them to America an appreciation of scholarship and conservative Lutheran theology.
- The preaching of the Johnsonian revival was aimed at the self-righteous and nominal state-church Christians. Johnson’s sermons could often appear negative as he tried to shock people out of their spiritual lethargy.
- The Johnsonian revival had a restraining effect on Grundtvigian rationalism.
- Johnson developed the “emergency principle” which contended that ordinarily only pastors should preach and the laity was to confine itself to private testimony. However, in times of shortages of pastors and the infidelity of the clergy a layman could preach.⁵¹⁰

The state church in Norway by the mid nineteenth century had elements of a revived Lutheran confessionalism, Haugean pietism, Grundtvigian rationalism, low church tendencies, and high church tendencies. The Johnsonian revival of confessional Lutheranism was dominant,

⁵⁰⁸ Nelson, *The Lutherans in North America*. 159-160.

⁵⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 160.

⁵¹⁰ E. Clifford Nelson, *The Union Movement among Norwegian-American Lutherans from 1880 to 1917*. (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, inc., 1967), 55-61.

but Norwegian Lutherans brought all of these elements to America. To a certain extent the divisions in the Lutheran Church in Norway became amplified in America.⁵¹¹

Norwegian Lutheranism in America

Notable Norwegian emigration to America began when the sloop “Restaurationen” brought about 53 immigrants to settle in New York in 1825. Later groups arrived in 1834 and 1835 and settled along the Fox River in Illinois. From 1840 until the close of the nineteenth century about 500,000 Norwegians immigrated to the United States. The majority were Lutherans. The largest settlements were in Illinois, Wisconsin, Iowa, Minnesota, North and South Dakota, Nebraska and Kansas. Some soon made their way to Utah, California, and the large Pacific coast ports.⁵¹²

The followers of the itinerant lay preacher, Elling Eielsen (1804-1883), founded the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, popularly known as the Eielsen Synod, at Jefferson Prairie, Wisconsin, in April 1846. The Eielsen Synod stressed conversion, repentance, and lay preaching, and was opposed to the ritualism and formalism of the state church in Norway.⁵¹³

In 1875-76 a split in the Eielsen Synod over Eielsen’s leadership and the inadequacies of the original constitution of the synod resulted in the formation of Hauge’s Synod. Hauge’s Synod retained the pietism and lay preaching emphasis of the Eielsen Synod but maintained a more formal organization and constitution than did the predecessor church body.⁵¹⁴

In 1851 three pastors, Claus Clausen (1820-1892), H.A. Stub, A.C. Preus (1814-1878), and representatives of six congregations formed The Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. In 1852 their numbers were augmented by newly arrived pastors, Herman Amberg

⁵¹¹ Jane Marie Pederson, *Between Memory and Reality: Family and Community in Rural Wisconsin, 1870-1970*. (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 120.

⁵¹² *Grace for Grace 1853-1943, 1918-1943*. ed. by S.C. Ylvisaker (Mankato: Lutheran Synod book company, 1943), 11-12.

⁵¹³ *The Lutherans in North America*. 185.

⁵¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 186.

Preus (1825-1894), G. F. Dietrichsen, and Nils O. Brandt (1824-1921). H.A. Preus soon recognized a Grundtvigian error in the constitution of the newly founded synod. The confessional paragraph “tended to place the baptismal confession (Apostles Creed) above Scripture as the criterion of Christian teaching.”⁵¹⁵ Preus moved to strike the error and when the motion passed the synod had to dissolve itself because it had changed one of the unalterable articles of the constitution. In 1853 a new constitution was adopted and The Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church in America was founded a second time.⁵¹⁶ This group was popularly known as the Norwegian Synod.

The Norwegian Synod soon developed very close relations with the Missouri Synod and entered into a worker training agreement with Missouri in 1857. The Norwegian Synod agreed to supply a professor for Missouri’s Concordia Seminary in St. Louis and Concordia would train Norwegian students to serve as pastors in the Norwegian Synod. The synod resolution stated

This temporary arrangement would bring a three fold advantage: 1) provide teachers for the Church in the near future; 2) help the Synod to gain experience before starting its own school; 3) bring the Synod into contact with a church body which had been established on a truly Lutheran foundation and thus help it to become strengthened in the knowledge of Christian doctrine and of matters pertaining to church government.⁵¹⁷

The close relationship between the Missouri Synod and the Norwegian Synod led the latter to become a charter member of the Synodical Conference in 1872. At the founding of the Synodical Conference the Norwegian Synod was asked to pledge itself to all of the confessions in the Book of Concord. The Lutheran Church in Norway pledged itself only to Luther’s *Small Catechism* and the *Augsburg Confession*. Since the Norwegians had neither been a part of the controversies leading to the writing of the *Formula of Concord* nor involved in the gathering of

⁵¹⁵ Nelson, *The Lutherans in North America*, 187. The confessional paragraph stated, “The doctrine of the Church is that which is revealed through God’s Holy Word in our baptismal covenant and also in the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments, interpreted in agreement with the Symbolical Writings of the Church of Norway, which are: 1) the Apostolic Creed, 2) the Nicene Creed, 3) the Athanasian Creed, 4) the Unaltered Augsburg Confession which was delivered to Emperor Charles V at Augsburg 1530, 5) Luther’s Small Catechism.

⁵¹⁶ J. Herbert Larson and Juul B. Madson, *Built on the Rock: The Evangelical Lutheran Synod – Seventy-fifth Anniversary, 1918-1993*. (Mankato: Evangelical Lutheran Synod Book Company, 1992), 7-8.

⁵¹⁷ English translation in *Grace for Grace: 1853-1943, 1918-1943*. 69.

the *Book of Concord*, the Norwegian Lutheran Church had never subscribed to the other confessions contained in the *Book of Concord*. The minutes of the founding convention of the Synodical Conference offer this explanation:

But since the honorable Norwegian Synod has attached to its complete assent to the Constitution the question whether it could enter the Synodical Conference as a member, even though as an individual synod it pledge itself, as is well known, only to the Unaltered Augsburg Confession and Luther's Small Catechism, the explanation was given by the Synodical Conference that the Scandinavian Lutherans had always been regarded as orthodox, even though not all symbolical books had achieved official ecclesiastical recognition among them; nevertheless the Synodical Conference naturally demands that the honorable Norwegian Lutheran Synod, in so far as it is a part of the Synodical Conference, pledge itself to all the confessional writings of the Evangelical Lutheran Church and in the event of a doctrinal controversy to be guided and judged thereby. Since this was agreed to by the representatives of the honorable Norwegian Synod, the Conference found no impediment to its acceptance.⁵¹⁸

This agreement had important implications for the Election Controversy which would break out about seven years later.

Another Norwegian synod traces its origins to the Northern Illinois Synod, founded in 1851. The Northern Illinois Synod was unique in that it combined "American," German, Swedish, and Norwegian Lutheran elements. The harmony was rather short lived, however. In 1860 the Swedish and Norwegian elements withdrew from the Northern Illinois Synod because of the latter's lack of confessionalism. The name of the new synod indicated the confessional concern of the Scandinavians. They called their synod the Scandinavian Evangelical Lutheran *Augustana* Synod.⁵¹⁹ In 1870 the Norwegian and Danish elements of the Augustana Synod peacefully split off to form The Norwegian-Danish Augustana Synod. This synod subscribed to the entire Book of Concord. Influenced by Haugeanism, this little synod often found itself in opposition to the position of the larger Norwegian Synod. In 1870 another group of Norwegians split off from the Augustana Synod to form the Conference for the Norwegian-Danish

⁵¹⁸ *Synodical Conference Proceedings*, 1872. 13. English translation by Edward C. Fredrich, "The Formula of Concord in the History of American Lutheranism," in *No Other Gospel: Essays in Commemoration of the 400th Anniversary of the Formula of Concord, 1580-1980*. Arnold J. Koelpin, ed. (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1980), 114.

⁵¹⁹ Nelson, *The Lutherans in North America*, 170-171. The Augsburg Confessions is often called the *Augustana* in Lutheran circles.

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The Conference specified only the three ecumenical creeds, the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, and Luther's Small Catechism as its doctrinal basis. The Conference tried to take a position between the Norwegian Synod and the low-church Haugean pietists.⁵²⁰

By 1875 there were five distinct Norwegian synods in the United States: the Eielsen Synod, Hauge's Synod, the Norwegian Synod, the Norwegian-Danish Conference, and the Norwegian-Danish Augustana Synod. The Norwegian Synod was the largest and strongest of the five synods.⁵²¹

The Nineteenth Century Break in the Norwegian Synod over Election

The chief protagonist in the Election Controversy in the Synodical Conference was the Norwegian Synod's Professor Friedrich Schmidt. Schmidt had been a student of Walther's and a colleague of his at St. Louis. Schmidt had learned Norwegian while a student at St. Louis. Schmidt was later called to teach at the Norwegian Synod's Luther College at Half-Way Creek, Iowa (the college was later moved to Decorah, Iowa). In 1872 Schmidt left Luther College and came to St. Louis to serve as the Norwegian Synod's professor at Missouri's seminary. When the Norwegian Synod founded a seminary of its own in Madison Wisconsin, in 1876, it was only natural for Schmidt to be called to serve at that institution.⁵²²

In 1879 Schmidt challenged Walther's teaching on election and soon had about one third of the Norwegian Synod's pastors and congregations on his side. Part of the appeal in Schmidt's teaching came from the nearly universal use of Pontoppidan's catechism among Norwegian Lutherans. Question 548 of Pontoppidan's exposition of Luther's Small Catechism taught election *intuitu fidei*. "What is election? God has appointed all those to eternal life who He from

⁵²⁰ *Ibid.*, 188-190.

⁵²¹ *Ibid.*, 189.

⁵²² Ludwig Fuerbringer, *Persons and Events: Reminiscences of Ludwig Ernest Fuerbringer*. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947), 148-151.

eternity has foreseen would accept the offered grace, believe in Christ and remain constant in this faith unto the end.”⁵²³

Schmidt was opposed by the leaders of the Norwegian Synod including, President Herman A. Preus, Pastor Jakob A. Ottenson (1825-1904), and the “Norwegian Walther,” Pastor Ulrik V. Koren (1826-1910). Koren was especially noteworthy for his theological leadership. Schmidt and his followers accused the leaders of the Norwegian Synod of blindly following Walther and his “new” doctrine of election. Koren maintained that the doctrine that Walther taught was the doctrine that they had learned from Gisle Johnson at the University of Christiana. Koren explained,

The claim was made that a new doctrine had come into being in Missouri. This frightened many. How untrue this was has been demonstrated by Professors Frich and Stub, by President Halvorson, the Rev. J.A. Thorsen and other pastors, and besides, by several laymen. The Norwegian pastors had this doctrine with them from Norway. It was taught at the university and, in the main points, just as in the Missouri Synod.⁵²⁴

In 1882 Schmidt was chosen to be one of the Norwegian Synod’s delegates to the Synodical Conference convention. Missouri refused to seat him as a delegate because he had accused the synod of false doctrine. Wisconsin joined with Missouri because Schmidt had interfered in Wisconsin’s congregation in Oshkosh, Wisconsin. His interference resulted in the majority of the congregation leaving the synod and a minority founding a new Wisconsin Synod congregation.⁵²⁵ Fully ten of the eleven sessions of the convention dealt with Schmidt and the Election Controversy. In 1883 the Norwegian Synod withdrew from the Synodical Conference in order to deal with the growing problem in their midst. The synod, however, remained in fellowship with the conference.⁵²⁶ A later historian offers this explanation:

In 1883 the Norwegian Synod also resolved to withdraw from the Synodical Conference, not because of disagreement in doctrine with the other synods, but because it hoped that a

⁵²³ Quoted in *The Union Movement among Norwegian Lutherans*, 460, footnote 2.

⁵²⁴ Ulrik V. Koren, “Why Is there No Church Unity among Norwegian Lutherans in America?” *Kirketidende* (1905). English translation by C.U. Faye, www.blts.edu/essays/KorenUV. The quote is on page 16 of the English translation.

⁵²⁵ Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, 61.

⁵²⁶ Armin Schuetze, *The Synodical Conference*, 106-111.

settlement of the controversy which raged within the Synod itself might more easily be reached. Since the discussions in the Synodical Conference were carried on for the greater part in the German language which was not understood by the majority of the Norwegians, it was feared membership in this body would complicate matters and make a settlement more difficult.⁵²⁷

Prior to the withdrawal from the Synodical Conference the dispute within the Norwegian Synod had become quite heated. Both sides printed pamphlets and published articles in periodicals. "Schmidt's battle against Walther had become a civil war in the Norwegian Synod."⁵²⁸ Through the influence of Schmidt the congregation at Norway Grove, near DeForest, Wisconsin, deposed their pastors, father and son. On Good Friday 1883 supporters of Schmidt actually carried President Herman A. Preus physically out of his own church.⁵²⁹

In 1884 the Norwegian Synod convention in Minneapolis discussed a set of theses produced by a "Peace Committee" but did not succeed in bringing about a reconciliation.⁵³⁰ That fall the General Pastoral Conference met in Decorah, Iowa, and discussed a document prepared by Ulrik Koren entitled, "An Accounting to the Congregations of the Norwegian Synod."⁵³¹ In the introductory paragraphs Koren complained that the Norwegian Synod majority had been charged with errors of two kinds. The one set consisted of doctrine they had never taught and actually had repudiated. Koren, no doubt, had in mind the accusation that they taught irresistible grace and contradictory wills in God. Nevertheless their opponents continued to accuse them of teaching what they had indeed rejected. The second set consisted of doctrine which they taught and confessed because it was the doctrine of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions. By the second set Koren undoubtedly meant the teaching of election by grace alone and the rejection of the expression election *intuitu fidei*. The Norwegian Synod majority denied that faith was a cause

⁵²⁷ *Grace for Grace: 1853-1943, 1918-1943*. 60-61.

⁵²⁸ Schuetze, *The Synodical Conference*, 109.

⁵²⁹ John A. Moldstad, Jr. *Predestination: Chosen in Christ* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 87.

⁵³⁰ Schuetze, *The Synodical Conference*, 109.

⁵³¹ An English translation of this entire document is provided in *Grace for Grace*, 173-188.

of election. They also rejected the teaching that some unregenerate human beings resist the Holy Spirit less than others. Koren continues by explaining the purpose of this *Accounting*.

We owe our congregations an accounting for what we teach and confess; and although we dare to believe that our hearers both know our testimony and will judge it by what they hear of us and not by what others say, we have still considered it our duty to present to you now this our common complete accounting, in which we hope no essential question that concerns the disputed doctrines has been unanswered.⁵³²

“The Accounting” included theses on universal grace, conversion, election, and the certainty by faith of preservation in faith and salvation. His theses on these doctrines echoed the teaching of Walther and the other theologians of the Synodical Conference.

Koren’s approach to theology was the same as that of Walther, Hoenecke, and the other theologians of the Synodical Conference. Reason must be taken captive to allow clear, but apparently contradictory statements to stand and one must formulate doctrine from the passages of Scripture that treat that doctrine, not from passages that treat other doctrines.

There is no real contradiction between Scripture’s doctrine of universal grace and that of election, although these doctrines cannot be harmonized by reason. He who seeks to harmonize them before the judgment of reason will not succeed in doing so, except by limiting or changing one or the other of them, and must, on the one hand, depart from the Scripture doctrine concerning election, and, on the other hand, from the Scripture doctrine of the universality of God’s grace (Calvinism) or from the Scripture doctrine concerning man’s complete corruption (Synergism). Scripture gives us no other explanation than that in Hos. 13,9: “O Israel, thou has destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help.” II Cor. 1,18-19, I Cor. 2,12-13, I Tim. 2,4; cf. Acts 13,48; Matth. 23,37; cf. Rom. 9,16.

Every article of faith must be sought in those Scripture passages in which the respective doctrine is specially and thoroughly treated by the holy writers. Other passages in which the doctrine is only incidentally mentioned must be explained in accordance with those passages. Rom. 12:6; I Pet. 4,11.

It is therefore an improper way to treat Scripture when people in the doctrine of election partly set aside more or less those passages where this teaching is specially and thoroughly treated, partly want to explain these in accordance with such passages as either treat this doctrine only in passing or do not treat it at all.⁵³³

⁵³² “An Accounting” in *Grace for Grace*, 173-174.

⁵³³ *Ibid.*, 182. See also Koren’s 1881 essay, “Can and Ought a Christian Be Certain of His Salvation?” English translation in *Lutheran Synod Quarterly*, vol. 43, 2-3, 148-188.

The majority of the Norwegian Synod's pastors and professors signed "The Accounting," but Schmidt and an "Anti-Missourian" minority refused. The latter group met in Red Wing, Minnesota, in October of 1885 and adopted some far-reaching resolutions. They resolved that all who signed "the Accounting" and did not recant were to be deposed from office. Bjug Harstad (1848-1933), the president of the Minnesota District, and Ulrik Koren, the president of the Iowa District, were among those they believed should be removed. They also resolved that Hans G. Stub (1849-1931) and Joh. Ylvisaker (1858-1917) should to be removed from their teaching positions as seminary professors at the Norwegian Synod's seminary in Madison, Wisconsin. In 1886 the Anti-Missourians established a seminary of their own at St. Olaf's School in Northfield, Minnesota.⁵³⁴ St. Olaf's had been founded in 1874 by an independent group from the Norwegian Synod. Since the school was independent the synod did not have direct supervision and St. Olaf's became affiliated with the Anti-Missourians and their successor synod.

In 1887 the Norwegian Synod took action, declaring that the opening of an opposition seminary was divisive. The synod in convention passed the following resolution by a vote of 230 to 98:

1. The Synod cannot but consider the erection of a new theological school at Northfield
 - (a) as an act of opposition to break down the Synod's schools which have been established in accordance with its constitution;
 - (b) as a breach of the Synod's constitution and of the obligations those who enter the Synod have assumed over towards resolutions regarding how the schools are to be erected, how teachers are to be appointed at them, and how the Synod is to exercise supervision over them;
 - (c) as an act which in itself is divisive, and which, as surely as it is continued, will steadily tend more and more to tear asunder and split the Synod and thus undermine not only its constitution and schools but also the Synod itself.
2. Therefore the Synod cannot tolerate in its members that such an activity is continued and must earnestly admonish those who have been along in it to admit their error and withdraw from it.⁵³⁵

That same year the dissenters left the Norwegian Synod and formed the Anti-Missourian Brotherhood. In 1890 the Anti-Missourian Brotherhood joined with the Norwegian-Danish

⁵³⁴ Schuetze, *The Synodical Conference*, 110.

⁵³⁵ English translation in *Grace for Grace*, 189-190.

Augustana Synod, and the Norwegian Danish Conference to form the United Norwegian Lutheran Church in America.

Although there were some key differences separating the various Norwegian synods, there were also some early efforts to seek understanding and agreement. In the early 1870s there were two free conferences attended by pastors and professors from the Norwegian Synod and the Norwegian-Danish Conference. The first was held in 1871, in Decorah, Iowa. The second took place in 1872 in Rock Prairie (Luther Valley), Wisconsin. At the urging of Norwegian Synod Pastor B. J. Muus (1832-1900), the founder of St. Olaf's school and president of the synod's Minnesota District, nine regional free conferences were held with members of the Norwegian Synod, Hauge's Synod, and the Norwegian-Danish Conference participating. By 1880 it was evident that a grass roots movement of pastors and laymen aimed at peace and eventual union had developed.⁵³⁶

In the early 1880s members of the three synods came together for three more free conferences. The first was held at St. Ansgar, Iowa, June 24-30, 1881. A large group of 341 assembled (164 from the Norwegian Synod, 138 from the Norwegian-Danish Conference, and the remaining 39 from Hauge's Synod, the Norwegian Augustana Synod, and the Swedish Augustana Synod). The topic was objective or universal justification (usually spoke of in Norwegian circles as the "justification of the world"). This doctrine had been a point of contention for some time. The Norwegian Synod taught that absolution "is a powerful impartation of the forgiveness of sins." The Norwegian Synod, pointing to 2 Corinthians 5:19, taught that if the world was reconciled to God because he did not count men's sins against them, then the world was justified or forgiven. The Augustana Synod, however, held that "the Gospel contains, presents and offers the forgiveness of sins to all who hear it, but this forgiveness is given, imparted and bestowed

⁵³⁶ E. Clifford Nelson and Eugene L. Fevold, *The Lutheran Church among Norwegian-Americans: A History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1960), vol. I, 39-311.

only to those who have faith in it.” The Augustana Synod was concerned that the expression “justification of the world” denied the necessity of justification by faith.⁵³⁷

Pastor Rasmussen and Professor Schmidt of the Norwegian Synod began to fault the teaching of their synod. Since Schmidt in the Election Controversy was contending for election in view of faith, he was beginning to have difficulties in speaking of a justification of the world apart from the faith of the individual.⁵³⁸ In fact, Schmidt declared that the real issue in conflict was justification.⁵³⁹ Schmidt’s essay on justification presented at the very first convention of the Synodical Conference, however, had clearly taught a justification of the world.

Two more free conferences were held. The next conference took place in Roland, Iowa, in October 1882. General agreement was expressed on five theses discussing the appropriation of the fruits of Christ’s work of redemption by faith. The final free conference met in Goodhue County, Minnesota, June 27-July 4, 1883. The subject for discussion was the doctrine of absolution. One side historically taught universal or objective justification (justification of the world), contending that the pronouncement of forgiveness won by Christ and declared by God to the world leads people to believe in their Savior. The other side was not willing to speak of justification apart from faith (subjective or personal justification). A set of theses seeking to harmonize the differences on this doctrine was adopted with little opposition. “The conference revealed that many in the different synods considered themselves of one mind.”⁵⁴⁰

Prior to 1883 there were internal problems not only in the Norwegian Synod between the Norwegian Synod majority and the Anti-Missourian minority, but also in the Danish-Norwegian Conference. In the 1870s the Conference was divided between Old School and New School factions. The New School trumpeted congregational freedom with unrestricted lay activity and a “democratic” ministry. The New School was particularly concerned about ministerial

⁵³⁷ Herman A. Preus, “History of Norwegian Lutherans in America to 1917.” *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly*. vol. 40 (October 1967) 112.

⁵³⁸ Nelson and Fevold, *The Lutheran Church among Norwegian Americans*. vol. I, 315-317.

⁵³⁹ Haug, *The Predestination Controversy in the Lutheran Church in North America*, 787.

⁵⁴⁰ Nelson and Fevold, *The Lutheran Church among Norwegian Americans*, vol. I, 323. See 322-324.

“authoritarianism” and an “over-emphasis” on doctrine. They believed that Pontoppidan’s exposition of Luther’s *Small Catechism* was sufficient for cooperation among congregations. In fact, the New School men favored cooperation between synods rather than the merger of the synods. The Old School men were concerned that the New School did not appreciate the importance of doctrine and doctrinal discussions. They feared that such an attitude would result in lack of doctrinal clarity. They believed that the New School did not really understand the proper relationship between the universal priesthood and the public ministry. By 1883 the conflict between the two sides had subsided, although it would break out again about a decade later.⁵⁴¹ This lack of appreciation for doctrine and doctrinal clarity eventually triumphed in the Norwegian merger of 1917.

After the free conference of 1883 the Norwegian Synod, the Danish Norwegian Conference, the Norwegian Augustana Synod, and Hauge’s Synod held joint meetings with official representatives chosen by each of the synods in an effort to reach mutual understanding and agreement. The first joint meeting was held in Chicago, January 28 to February 5, 1885. The discussions on contested doctrines produced little agreement, but the four synods did produce a statement about the requirements for recognizing each synod as Lutheran with the goal of eventually forming one synod.

1. That they accept the canonical books of holy Scripture as God’s revealed Word and therefore the only source and rule of faith, doctrine, and life.
2. That they without reservation accept and firmly maintain the confessional writings of the Norwegian Lutheran Church.
 - a. The three ancient symbols: the Apostolic, Nicene, and Athanasian.
 - b. The unaltered Augsburg Confession and Luther’s *Small Catechism*.
3. That the church bodies do not by any official act deny their acceptance of said Scripture and confession.⁵⁴²

⁵⁴¹ Nelson, *The Lutherans in North America*. 337-339.

⁵⁴² *Referat af Forhandlingerne I det første Fællesmøde for de fire norske Kirkesamfund i Amerika afholdt i Chicago, Illinois. . . 1885* (Chicago: Norwegian Lutheran Publishing Society, n.d.), 35. The English translation is in Nelson and Fevold, *The Lutheran Church among Norwegian-Americans*. vol. I, 326.

There was another joint meeting in Goodhue County, Minnesota, May 14 to 20, 1886. Hauge's Synod sent no representatives. Before the third meeting could be held in 1887 a split had occurred in the Norwegian Synod. The Anti-Missourian Brotherhood consisting of about a third of the synod's pastors and congregations broke off and formed a fellowship.

When the Anti-Missourian Brotherhood separated from the Norwegian Synod they did not form a new synod but established a fellowship with the goal of bringing about a merger with some of the other Norwegian Lutheran groups. They asked the Danish Norwegian Conference, the Norwegian Augustana Synod, and Hauge's Synod to choose representatives and send them to another joint meeting. In order to promote their proposal the Brotherhood sent representatives to the conventions of each of those synods to encourage participation.⁵⁴³

The first of the meetings took place in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, August 15 to 23, 1888. It was evident already at this meeting that the Hauge's Synod was not totally committed to merger. That synod chose not to join the merged synod in 1890. Nevertheless the representatives of the four synods hammered out an agreement that made the Holy Scriptures, the Augsburg Confession, Luther's Small Catechism, and Pontoppidan's exposition the basis for union. The agreement also stipulated that previous disputes on the atonement and justification, the gospel, absolution, Sunday observance, and election had all been settled.⁵⁴⁴

The Norwegian Synod having suffered the painful loss of one third of its membership in the Anti-Missourian Brotherhood separation was not interested in participating in the merger talks. A later Norwegian writer was skeptical that the three synods had reached real agreement in the disputed doctrines.

It is no exaggeration to say that the only bond of union between these three groups was their common hatred of the Norwegian Synod and its uncompromising adherence to "the Word Alone and Grace Alone." For Dr. Schmidt had been a leader in the controversy on Absolution, the Gospel, Justification, etc., on the side of the Norwegian Synod. Yet

⁵⁴³ E. Clifford Nelson, *The Union Movement among Norwegian-American Lutherans from 1880 to 1917*.
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⁵⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 251-257.

nothing was done to reconcile the differences between him and the Augustana Synod and the Conference on these and other points.⁵⁴⁵

A second meeting took place in Scandinavia, Wisconsin, November 15-21, 1888. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the report of the Eau Claire meeting. The organizers of this meeting encouraged all the congregations of the four synods as well as independent Norwegian Lutheran congregations to send congregational representatives. Representatives of the Hauge's Synod raised some objections to the wording of certain sections of the report, but the major discussion took place over a practical matter rather than a doctrinal matter. The major disagreement was on the establishment of a "professor's fund" to support the ministerial educational program of the proposed merged synod. Set dollar amounts of support were established for each participating synod. The Hauge's Synod raised the greatest objection to the proposal. Nevertheless the proposal passed and the meeting was concluded with a joint celebration of the Lord's Supper.⁵⁴⁶

In 1889 the Hauge's Synod withdrew from the merger process. The three remaining synods each met in Minneapolis on June 11, 1890, for the last time as independent church bodies. On June 13 the joint synod met under the name The United Norwegian Lutheran Church in America.⁵⁴⁷

Soon some of the old animosities between the "New School" and "Old School" factions of the Norwegian Danish Conference came to the fore once again. The "New School" men had always been concerned about the rights of the congregation over against the synod and the minority over against the majority in a synod. They also had differences over the nature of theological education. The United Church had chosen the Augsburg Seminary controlled by "New School" men to be its seminary. The "Friends of Augsburg" actually owned the seminary and refused to turn it over to the United Church. The "Friends of Augsburg" separated from the

⁵⁴⁵ *Grace for Grace*, 190.

⁵⁴⁶ Nelson, *The Union Movement among Norwegian-American Lutherans from 1880 to 1917*. 263-270.

⁵⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 281-289.

United Church in 1897 to form the Lutheran Free Church. A Minnesota Supreme Court decision declared in 1898 that the Friends of Augsburg were the legitimate owners of the seminary. The Conference had never legally owned it and therefore could not transfer its ownership to the United Church.⁵⁴⁸

Already in 1890 there were some efforts to reach mutual understanding between the new United Church and the Norwegian Synod. The Norwegian Synod actually took the lead by inviting representatives of the United Church and the Hauge's Synod to discuss the possibility of union.⁵⁴⁹ Responding to a memorial sent in by its Minnesota District, the Norwegian Synod passed the following resolution at its 1890 convention:

1. The Synod acknowledges its obligation to work for unity among Norwegian Lutheran church bodies here in this country, and shall according to ability seek to fulfill this obligation.
2. The further development of this matter shall be the task of the committee elected by the Synod.⁵⁵⁰

President Th. N. Mohn of St. Olaf's also arranged for a meeting of professors from St. Olaf's, Augsburg Seminary, and the Norwegian Synod's seminary.⁵⁵¹

The Norwegian Synod's resolution resulted in a preliminary meeting in 1891 to determine how to proceed. Representatives of the Norwegian Synod and the United Church decided to have each synod choose thirty representatives to discuss some of the issues that separated them. An invitation was also sent to the Hauge's Synod. The meeting took place in Willmar, Minnesota, January 6-12, 1892. Interestingly enough the meeting was better attended by the Norwegian Synod than the United Church. The Hauge's Synod did not participate. Three issues emerged: whether the two groups ought to join in prayer fellowship,⁵⁵² whether the inspiration of the Scriptures ought to be a condition of union, and whether subscription to the

⁵⁴⁸ Nelson, *The Lutherans in North America*. 289, 341-344.

⁵⁴⁹ Theodore A. Aaberg, *A City Set on a Hill*. (Mankato: Board of Publications-Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1968), 45,

⁵⁵⁰ Nelson, *The Union Movement among Norwegian-American Lutherans from 1880 to 1917*. 407-408.

⁵⁵¹ Aaberg, *A City Set on a Hill*, 45

⁵⁵² Historically confessional Lutherans insisted on complete doctrinal unity every expression of church fellowship, including joint prayer.

entire Book of Concord would be required.⁵⁵³ The United Church reluctantly agreed that the meeting would begin only with a devotional reading without joint prayer. In the other two matters the opinion of the United Church prevailed.⁵⁵⁴ The Norwegian Synod had pressed for a statement on inspiration because it was a burning issue of the day and some Norwegian Lutheran pastors had forsaken the old Lutheran doctrine of inspiration. Some were questioning the divine character of the Bible. A committee was appointed to prepare a statement on Scripture that would find acceptance. The committee produced the following resolution which passed unanimously.

In regard to church union between the Synod and the United Church we consider the unanimous acceptance of the canonical books of the Holy Scriptures as God's revealed, infallible Word on the part of both church bodies as a fully sufficient basis for church union.

Note. Our position in relation to Holy Scripture is given expression in Pontoppidan's answers to Questions 12, 15, and 18 in *Sandhed til Gudfrygtighed*.⁵⁵⁵

The meeting ultimately did not accomplish anything substantial. However, there remained an openness to meet in spite of the new issues which had been raised.

The next free conference did not take place until September of 1897. The place was Lanesboro, Minnesota. As the doctrine of election was discussed the conference turned also to a discussion of conversion, free will, and the power of a human being to cooperate in his own conversion.⁵⁵⁶ Those who held to election in view of faith posited an element of free human will in conversion. They believed that there was a difference in the resistance of some unregenerate which accounted for their conversion. The old divisions were apparent and nothing was

⁵⁵³ The Norwegian Synod for some time had subscribed to the entire Book of Concord. The United Synod followed the pattern of the Church in Norway, subscribing only to the Unaltered Augsburg Confession and Luther's Small Catechism. They declined to subscribe to the other confessions in the Book of Concord because they were unfamiliar with them.

⁵⁵⁴ Nelson, *The Union Movement among Norwegian-American Lutherans from 1880 to 1917*, 410-417.

⁵⁵⁵ *Referat af Forhandlingerne i Deleatmødet mellem Komiteer valgte af Synoden for den norske evang.-lutherske Kirke i Amerika og den forenede norske lutherske Kirke i Amerika, afholdt i Wilmar, Minn., fra onsdag de 6te Januar til den 12te Januar 1892.* (Decorah, Iowa: Lutheran Publishing House, 1892), 49. English translation in Nelson, *The Lutheran Church among Norwegian-Americans*. vol. 2, 135.

⁵⁵⁶ Preus, "History of Norwegian Lutherans in America to 1917." 116-117.

accomplished. One final attempt at a free conference in 1899 in Austin, Minnesota, was poorly attended and brought about the end of the free conferences.⁵⁵⁷

The Union Movement after 1900

In 1900 the district conventions of the Norwegian Synod issued an invitation to the United Church to discuss doctrinal issues in a colloquy which was to include the presidents of the two synods and their theological faculties. Two meetings were to be held on the condition that there would be no minutes kept or reports published. Friedrich Schmidt of the United Synod did not agree with the procedure and published an article which offered a partial report on the first meeting. He claimed that the theses discussed at the colloquy amounted to a compromise document. Schmidt had historically been opposed to glossing over the differences on the doctrines of election and conversion. He broke with the Synodical Conference because of differences in doctrine and also separated from the Norwegian Synod. Haug reports

(Schmidt) called the talk about the two patterns of teaching “humbug” and said it should be buried. He maintained that it was not only a matter of two different modes of teaching but of two sharply conflicting doctrines. He argued that if someone does not believe that God considered man’s faith when he elected him, one also does not believe that God justifies those in whom He found faith. “We disagree in the doctrine of justification,” Schmidt declared. “This is the real point at issue.”⁵⁵⁸

After so many years of controversy the Norwegian Synod was growing tired of dealing with Schmidt. The Church Council of the Synod in 1902 recommended that there be no more meetings if Schmidt was going to be one of the participants and in fact, requested that the United Church replace Schmidt. When the United Church refused to do so, the second meeting did not take place. The Church Council of the Norwegian Synod eventually published a pamphlet

⁵⁵⁷ Nelson, *The Lutheran Church among Norwegian-Americans*. vol. 2, 138-139.

⁵⁵⁸ Haug, *The Predestination Controversy in the Lutheran Church in North America*, 787.

claiming that Schmidt had proven himself unreliable and even dishonest in a number of instances during the continuing controversy on election.⁵⁵⁹

From 1902 until 1905 there were no more inter-synodical discussions to resolve the doctrinal and practical issues separating the various Norwegian groups. Nevertheless there were developments which would pave the way for Norwegian Lutheran merger.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries there arose a number of Norwegian-American societies which attempted to preserve Norwegian culture and foster socializing among Norwegian-Americans. Athletic and musical clubs sprang up in communities where there were sufficient numbers of Norwegian immigrants and their descendants. The Norwegian musical heritage was particularly strong in binding Norwegian-Americans together. Performances of secular and religious music by Norwegian composers and even Norwegian folk music were weekly occurrences in some areas. Norwegian-American cultural pride and identity began to have a moderating influence on religious disputes. Common culture was beginning to trump doctrine.

Churches drew strength from the fact that ethnic identity was closely tied to religion among immigrants, and eventually class hostilities brought from Norway and expressed in the doctrinal battles faded in importance. The result was a distinct weaving of traditions of both the Norwegian peasant culture and the Norwegian elites in the American environment.⁵⁶⁰

A rather unique organization called a *bygdelag* also developed. A *bygdelag* was a social organization comprised of Norwegians in America who had been born or could trace their ancestry to a particular valley, community, or region (*bygd*) in Norway. According to one source, “meetings resembled family reunions, but on a larger scale.”⁵⁶¹ Pastors and laymen from the various synods were often members and leaders of the same *bygdelag*. Meetings at times included presentations on a variety of ecclesiastical matters. At least one *lag*, the *Valdreslag*, had

⁵⁵⁹ *Grace for Grace*, 93-94. See also Nelson, *The Union Movement among Norwegian-American Lutherans from 1880 to 1917*. 425-426.

⁵⁶⁰ Pederson, *Between Memory and Reality*, 135.

⁵⁶¹ Arlow W. Andersen, *The Norwegian-Americans*. (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1975), 149. See the entire chapter, 138-156.

espoused the cause of church union, even though it was a non-religious society.⁵⁶² Pride in their Norwegian heritage became a strong contributing factor in the union movement. This pride, no doubt, was enhanced by Norway becoming independent from Sweden in 1905.

In 1905 the Hauge's Synod passed a resolution calling for the election of a new committee and the issuing of an invitation to renew merger talks. The United Synod and the Norwegian Synod responded favorably.

There were also some new developments in the Norwegian Synod. The same convention that accepted the invitation of the Hauge's Synod also elected a new vice-president. Dr. Koren, the leading theologian of the Norwegian Synod, had served as president of the synod since the death of President Herman Amberg Preus in 1894. Koren had now reached the age of seventy-nine and would not be able to serve as president much longer. The convention showed him the honor of reelecting him, but most delegates realized that the vice-president would have to take over much of the work. The synod elected Dr. Hans Stub (1849-1931) to the latter office. Since Stub was a professor, he did not have the right to vote at the convention. The synod's constitution stipulated that the president must cast his vote in case any convention vote ended in a tie. To enable Stub to serve, the synod quickly passed a resolution that in the future any tie vote would be considered lost. One opponent of the eventual merger gives this opinion of Stub's election:

He was the candidate of the more liberal element which considered that the leadership of the Synod hitherto had been too strict. During the convention much propaganda was carried on, and the slogan of the more liberal element was: "Let us break the Decorah ring!" . . . Stub was elected by 181 of the 328 votes cast.⁵⁶³

The "Decorah Ring" was a group of pastors and theologians in and around Decorah, Iowa, led by Koren, which was opposed to the union if it meant compromising the synod's doctrinal position. Koren died in 1910. Thereafter Stub became a strong proponent and leader of the union movement in the synod. Stub at one time had been a defender of the Synodical

⁵⁶² Nelson, *The Lutheran Church among Norwegian-Americans*. vol. 2, 153.

⁵⁶³ *Grace for Grace*, 95.

Conference position in the Election Controversy. It is somewhat difficult to understand his change in attitude. He may have been caught up in the spirit of Norwegian nationalism and ethnic pride or had grown weary of doctrinal controversy or had the desire for the prestige that would be his as the leader of a larger church body.

The union committees of the three synods met three times in Minneapolis in 1906. The subject for discussion at the first two meetings was absolution. A controversy over absolution had divided the Norwegians since 1861. The Norwegian Synod had defined absolution as “a powerful impartation of forgiveness which seemed to some to minimize the subjective human response to God’s objective act. The union committees adopted five theses on this teaching.”⁵⁶⁴

The topic for discussion at the third meeting was lay ministries and lay preaching. A controversy over lay activity had its roots in the Haugean Movement in Norway and surfaced in America because of the activity of men like Elling Eielsen. Eight theses were adopted by the joint committee recognizing the validity of lay preaching and the church’s wisdom in using these gifts while stating that lay preaching should not be unregulated but should be carried out only after a call by a congregation of Christians.

Nelson notes the friendly atmosphere that prevailed at these meetings and saw as significant that the Norwegian Synod representatives raised no objections to the joint prayer at the beginning and end of each session.⁵⁶⁵ In previous meetings they had abstained from this expression of fellowship.

⁵⁶⁴ Nelson, *The Union Movement among Norwegian-American Lutherans from 1880 to 1917*. 437-438. The first thesis spoke of absolution as God’s own absolving act through the ministry of the Word. The second and third theses spoke of absolution as a declaration of grace to the sinner which was offered, declared and bestowed by God in absolution and appropriated by faith. Thesis four declared that absolution is always a real and valid absolution of God. The fifth thesis stressed that a minister had the duty to “give conscientious attention to the profession in word and deed on the part of the confessors, lest the holy be given to dogs and the pearls be cast before swine (Matt. 7:6).” Nelson finds it significant that these theses were basically the same as those written by Schmidt and adopted by the Norwegian Synod in 1874. Schmidt was now opposing these theses.

⁵⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 438-442. An English translation of these agreements is contained in Appendix C in Nelson, *The Lutheran Church among Norwegian-Americans*. vol. 2, 344-358.

Two meetings in 1907 and one in 1908 discussed the call and conversion. At the latter meeting the union committees unanimously adopted a set of six theses on the call and eleven on conversion. The issue of whether human beings played a role in conversion or not was addressed. The theses were in harmony with the doctrine of the Synodical Conference but did not rule out by means of antitheses the synergism of Schmidt and the other Anti-Missourians. Nevertheless there were clear enough statements on divine monergism in conversion that Schmidt, who was a member of the United Synod's committee, could object to them. For instance, he refused to accept Thesis 11 on Conversion.

11. When man is converted, the honor belongs to God alone, because He throughout, from first to last, without any cooperation on man's part, works conversion in the man who is converted, i.e., acknowledges his sin and believes in Jesus.⁵⁶⁶

The Norwegian Synod raised no objections to these theses but members of the synod demanded that antitheses be added "to make sure that false doctrines formerly championed by other Synods were no longer held by them." The members of the Norwegian Synod's union committee assured their synod that this would be done.⁵⁶⁷ Antitheses were never added however.

In November of 1908 the joint committee turned its attention to the doctrine of election. Three sets of theses by three different authors (Stub, Kildahl, and Broeckmann) were presented. The committee made the theses presented by Stub the basis of discussion. Stub's theses were basically a "mild" restatement of Koren's principles in *An Accounting*. They echoed the Synodical Conference teaching.

7. There is according to the Word of God no contradiction between God's universal will of grace and His eternal election, although we cannot harmonize the two by our reason. Therefore election must not be torn loose from the universal grace in which it has its foundation, much less be put in contradiction to it. It is one and the same efficacious will of grace by which the elect are converted and saved and against which those who are lost harden themselves. Eph. 1,3 ff.; Matth. 22,1 ff., Rom. 8,28-30.

⁵⁶⁶ Quoted in *Grace for Grace*, 193.

⁵⁶⁷ "Unity, Union, and Unionism." (Mankato, Minnesota: Publication Board, November 1938). An electronic version of the pamphlet can be accessed at <http://www.evangelicalluthersynod.org/believe/nsaelc/uuu>. The quotation can be found on pages 14-15 of the electronic version.

8. Scripture abides simply by this: When a man is not elected or does not gain salvation, the reason for this must not be sought in any foreordination of God or in any lack in His will of grace, but solely and alone in the resistance which man offers to the end to this earnest call of grace from God; when a man is elected and saved, this is due solely and alone to God's free grace in Christ. Hos. 13,9; Matth. 23,37; Rom. 11,33-37; Eph. 2,4ff.⁵⁶⁸

Stub's theses were discussed at two subsequent meetings in 1909, but no progress was made. The joint committee appointed a subcommittee to see whether a satisfactory basis for agreement could be reached. At the next meeting in the spring of 1910 the subcommittee issued three sets of theses because it could come to no agreement. When the majority of the joint committee decided to continue the discussion on the basis of theses prepared by President Eastvold of the Hauge Synod, the representatives of the Norwegian Synod left the meeting.⁵⁶⁹

The district conventions of the Norwegian Synod in 1910 approved Stub's theses. However, the President of the United Church, T.H. Dahl (1845-1923), rejected the position of the Norwegian Synod as "unbiblical and un-Lutheran" at the United Synod's convention. He placed the blame for the disruption of the negotiations on the Norwegian Synod representatives. The United Church's committee members then issued "Election and the Union Movement," a pamphlet that demonstrated that the two synods were no closer to agreement on the doctrine than they had ever been.⁵⁷⁰ The pamphlet contrasted Stub's theses with their own statements on election and conversion declaring Stub's theses to be unbiblical and un-Lutheran doctrine." Pastor Bjug Harstad, one of the Norwegian minority, ten years later declared,

In [the pamphlet] the biblical, Lutheran doctrine was definitely rejected. The proofs were essentially the same as we had heard from Schmidt, Boeckmann, Kildahl and others so many times for several years. Consequently nothing is heard either of the demand for more proofs or from our Committee any refutation of the wretched rational arguments and perversion of the teaching of the Scriptures and the Confessions of which that document is full.⁵⁷¹

⁵⁶⁸ Quoted in *Grace for Grace*, 194.

⁵⁶⁹ "Unity, Union, and Unionism.," 15.

⁵⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁵⁷¹ Bjug Harstad, "President's Report" to the 1921 [Little] Norwegian Synod Convention, unpublished translation by Pastor J. H. Larsen. Quoted by Rev. Jerry Gernander in "The Drive to Opgjør: The Years

The union movement seemed to be dead.

Nelson suggests three reasons for the failure of the joint committee to reach agreement on the doctrine which had separated the synods for so many years.

One centered around the illusive and hardly assessable factor of personalities. The second was the apparent failure to recognize changes in the present situation as over against the old Election Controversy. The third factor was the persisting residuum of antithetical theological method.⁵⁷²

Nelson's observations are insightful, but a genuine resolution of the doctrinal controversy would hardly have been possible without a statement that demonstrated their doctrinal unity not only with clear theses but also with clear antitheses rejecting the errors that had previously divided them. Although the forthcoming Madison Settlement did contain antitheses on the doctrine of election, nevertheless it did not truly resolve the controversy. In reality the Madison Settlement was a compromise agreement which allowed the contending parties to profess agreement while continuing to hold conflicting doctrines of election and the role of human will in conversion.

In the meantime as the Norwegians were becoming Americanized, there was a growing desire for worship materials in English. The United Church, Hauge's Synod, and the Norwegian Synod in 1908 appointed representatives to a joint committee to produce an English hymnal and service book. *The Lutheran Hymnary* was published in 1912.⁵⁷³ The joint project was an expression of the desire for union and perhaps showed that the two synods had confidence that a merger would be consummated in the near future. Having a common English hymnal and service book also promoted union. When two groups worship with the same hymnal, doctrinal differences become blurred, particularly in the eyes of the laity.

The Madison Settlement (Opgjør)

1900-1917 in the Old Norwegian Synod," presented to the ELS General Pastoral Conference, October 7-9, 2003, 9.

⁵⁷² Nelson, *The Lutheran Church among Norwegian-Americans*, vol. 2, 166.

⁵⁷³ *Ibid.*, 102, 170-171.

The union movement seemed dead in 1910, but by 1911 there were some signs of life. A group of prominent pastors in the United Church signed a document in which they declared that the doctrinal position of the Norwegian Synod was not church divisive although it was somewhat different from their own. Evidently they were expressing some general dissatisfaction with the previous year's actions of their own synod's union committee. The United Church convention in 1911 elected an entirely new committee and sent greetings to the Norwegian Synod's convention. The Norwegian Synod also elected a new union committee.⁵⁷⁴ The new committee was comprised only of parish pastors. Theological professors were excluded.

Nelson suggests three reasons for the continued openness of the Norwegian Synod to a pan-Norwegian merger. Leaders like Hans Stub and Peter Laurentius Larsen (1833-1915) believed that there was room for differences in the expression of the doctrine of election. Secondly a joint committee of United Church, Hauge's Synod, and Norwegian Synod men had been working on a common service book and hymnal since 1908. Finally, laymen began to be vocal in their support of a union.⁵⁷⁵ In addition the Norwegian Synod had always tolerated the expression "election *intuitu fidei*" so long as the expression was not used to mask the false teaching that God was influenced in electing human beings by their conduct. The members of the synod were accustomed to the wording in Pontoppidan's Catechism: "That God has appointed all those to eternal life whom he from eternity has seen would accept the grace proffered to them, believe in Jesus and persevere in this faith unto the end." The synod accepted the expression as explained by the great Lutheran theologian of the seventeenth century, John Gerhard (1582-1637).⁵⁷⁶

The new joint union committee met in the fall of 1911 and again in February 1912. The Hauge's Synod was not represented because that church body had not been involved in the

⁵⁷⁴ *Grace for Grace*, 99-100.

⁵⁷⁵ Nelson, *The Lutheran Church among Norwegian-Americans*, vol. 2, 170-171.

⁵⁷⁶ See Koren, "An Accounting," in *Grace for Grace*, 183-184.

Election Controversy. A sub-committee consisting of two representatives from the United Church and two from the Norwegian Synod prepared theses which were presented to the entire committee at the meeting in February 1912. The joint union committee adopted a statement which became known as the Madison Settlement or in Norwegian *Opgjør* (settlement).⁵⁷⁷ The *Opgjør* committed the two synods to accepting both “forms” of the doctrine of election.

1. The Union Committees of the Synod and the United Church, unanimously and without reservation, accept that doctrine of election which is set forth in Article XI of the Formula of Concord (the so-called ‘first form of the doctrine’) and Pontoppidan’s Explanation (Sandhed til Gudfrygtighed), question 548 (the so-called ‘second form of the doctrine’).
2. Whereas the conferring bodies acknowledge that Art. XI of the Formula of Concord presents the pure and correct doctrine of God’s Word and the Lutheran Church regarding the Election of the children of God to salvation, it is deemed unnecessary to church union to construct new and more extensive theses on this article of faith.
3. But since in regard to the doctrine of Election it is well known that two forms of the doctrine have been used, both of which have been recognized in the orthodox Lutheran church, some, in accordance with the Formula of Concord, include under the doctrine of election, *viz.*, that some, with the Formula of Concord, make the doctrine of Election to comprise the whole order of salvation of the elect from the calling to the glorification, (cf. ‘Thorough Explanation,’ Articles 10-20) and teach an Election ‘to salvation through sanctification by the Holy Spirit and faith in the truth,’ while others, like Pontoppidan, in agreement with John Gerhard, Scriver and other acknowledged doctrinal fathers, define Election specifically as the decree of final glorification, with the Spirit’s work of faith and perseverance as its necessary postulate, and teach that ‘God has ordained to eternal life all those whom from eternity He foresaw would accept the proffered grace, believe in Christ, and remain steadfast in this faith unto the end;’ and since neither of these two forms of doctrine, presented in this wise, contradicts any doctrine revealed in the Word of God, but lets the order of salvation, as otherwise presented in God’s Word and the Confessions of the Church remain entirely intact and fully acknowledged, we find that this fact ought not be divisive of church unity, nor ought it disrupt the unity of spirit in the bond of peace which God wills should obtain between us.
4. Since, however, during the doctrinal controversy among us, words and expressions have been used—rightly or wrongly attributed to one party or the other—which seemed to the other side a denial of the Confession of the Church, we have agreed to reject all erroneous doctrines which seek to explain away the mystery of Election (Formula of Concord, Art. XI:38-64) either in a synergistic manner or in a Calvinizing way; in other words, we reject every doctrine which either, on the one hand would rob God of His honor as the only Savior, or, on the other hand would weaken man’s sense of responsibility in respect of the acceptance or rejection of grace.⁵⁷⁸

⁵⁷⁷ “Unity, Union, and Unionism,” 15-16.

⁵⁷⁸ The English version can be found in *Synodical Conference Proceedings*, 1912, 18-21. The paragraphs quoted are on 18-19.

A minority in the Norwegian Synod objected to the clause “or on the other hand would weaken man’s sense of responsibility in respect of the acceptance or rejection of grace.” They believed that this statement was contrary to the teaching of salvation by grace alone, denied the bondage of the will in unconverted human beings, and masked synergism. They did not see how it could be harmonized with the Formula of Concord or Luther’s *Bondage of the Will*. They proposed that the clause should be changed to read, “weaken man’s sense of duty in relation to the acceptance of grace and blame for the rejection of grace.”⁵⁷⁹

The various districts of the Norwegian Synod met in the summer of 1912. Individuals raised questions about the wording of the document and whether the synod by adopting *Opgjør* would be adopting the so-called second form of the doctrine of election. Members of the union committee assured the delegates that adopting the document in no wise implied the yielding of any point of doctrine. Rather it simply meant that they could recognize as brothers those who held the so-called second form of the doctrine in the light of the statements made in subsequent paragraphs of *Opgjør*. Receiving such assurance, the districts supported the work of the union committee.⁵⁸⁰

Other historians have suggested several other reasons for the Minnesota District of the Norwegian Synod voting with such unanimity in spite of the strong objections to the wording of *Opgjør*. No doubt these reasons applied to the other districts as well. Pastors and laymen alike were tired of controversy so that relatively minor concessions satisfied them. Some did not understand the full implications of rejecting or accepting the agreement. The Norwegian Synod had become accustomed to allowing a few leaders to be spokesmen and many lacked the courage to speak up or let their influence be felt. Everyone wanted an agreement and so they were

⁵⁷⁹ Preus, “History of Norwegian Lutherans in America to 1917,” 117-118.

⁵⁸⁰ Aaberg, *A City Set on a Hill*, 52-53

reluctant to say anything that might hinder unity. Synodical and district leadership also put pressure on the voters to support the cause of union.⁵⁸¹

The Norwegian Synod's English periodical, *Lutheran Herald*, edited by the Missouri Synod's Theodore Graebner (1876-1950), was critical of the Settlement. In May of 1913 the periodical contained a warning that if the Madison Settlement was accepted in its upcoming convention, the synod would be serving "notice to the world that it no longer stands where it stood with Dr. Preus, Dr. Koren, Dr. Larsen, and Dr. Stub thirty years ago." The article declared that in the past the Norwegian Synod had tolerated the "second form" in others, but it had never accepted the expression without certain "well-defined conditions." To accept that expression as coordinate and equal to the "first form" after the "second form" had been used by others for thirty years to cloak false doctrine simply was something quite different.⁵⁸²

In June 1913 Graebner announced his resignation as editor of the *Lutheran Herald*. He claimed that he was not resigning because of developments related to the *Opgjør*. His stated reason was that for too long he had been burning the candle at both ends and needed to give his other duties more attention. Nevertheless he did note a change that had occurred in the Norwegian Synod involving Norwegian nationalism.

There has been in recent years, also among Norwegian Lutherans, a most amazing assertion of the *racial spirit*. So strong has this spirit become, that even one who has by long association learned to love and admire the "tusen hjem" in the West-land, now finds himself rather a welcome stranger than a member of the household. The conclusion does not seem unreasonable, that a Synodical organ, though English in its idiom, would make friends still more rapidly, and exert a more powerful influence for good, if it were edited by a native son of the Norwegian Synod, and not an adopted one.⁵⁸³

Graebner's observation of an ever-increasing pride in their Norwegian background among Norwegian-Americans was perceptive. This Norwegian pride undoubtedly was the major driving force behind the union movement. After Graebner stepped down as editor, the *Lutheran Herald* ceased to voice concerns about the proposed union.

⁵⁸¹ *Grace for Grace*, 103.

⁵⁸² "If Opgjør Stands Unmodified," *Lutheran Herald*. vol. 8, (May 22, 1913), 478-479.

⁵⁸³ Theodore Graebner, "Personal," *Lutheran Herald*. vol. 8, (June 5, 1913) 527.

The leaders of the Norwegian Synod sought approval for the Madison Settlement from the Synodical Conference at the latter's convention in Saginaw, Michigan, in 1912. Even though the Norwegian Synod was no longer a member of the Synodical Conference, the Norwegian Synod continued to maintain fraternal relations with the synods of the Conference. President Hans Stub and Professor Johannes Ylvisaker (1845-1917) of the Norwegian Synod brought the *Opgjør* to Saginaw in the hope of receiving the blessing of the Synodical Conference on this union document. The convention devoted two days to the discussion of the Madison Settlement and then directed the praesidium to write a letter expressing concerns about the document.

The letter was dated August 19, 1912, and was signed by Carl Gausewitz (1861-1928) and John Meyer (1873-1964), the president and secretary of the Synodical Conference, respectively. The Synodical Conference made these requests:

- a) To eliminate from Theses 1-3 of the "Opgjør" the coordination of the so-called first and second form of doctrine, because only the first form represents the truth of the Scriptures and of the Confessions, while the second form is not found in God's Word and the confessional writings of the Lutheran Church, and hence is not entitled to such recognition in the Church.
- b) Inasmuch as the present state of affairs in our American Lutheran Church demands a proper antithesis to synergistic doctrine, we pray you to take steps to bring about a rejection of the teaching that man's conduct, in particular, his omission of the so-called willful resistance, either by his natural powers or by the power conferred by divine grace, is the reason by which we may explain why some are converted and elected rather than others, as our opponents in the American Lutheran Church teach.
- c) We pray you to enter into a fraternal discussion with us, according to the Scriptures and Confessions and in the spirit of truth and love, of your former theses on the Call and Conversion and your present theses on Election.⁵⁸⁴

The convention appointed a three-man committee to deliver the letter to the convention of the Norwegian Synod. The members of the committee were Professors W. H. T. Dau (1864-1944), Professor Franz Pieper (1852-1931), and Director John Schaller (1859-1920).⁵⁸⁵ Schaller resigned from the committee and was replaced by Professor Theodor Schlueter of Northwestern College in 1914.⁵⁸⁶ The Norwegian Synod praesidium responded that to have a committee of the

⁵⁸⁴ *Synodical Conference Proceedings*, 1912. 24. The entire letter is printed on pages 23-24.

⁵⁸⁵ *Synodical Conference Proceedings*, 1912. 24.

⁵⁸⁶ *Synodical Conference Proceeding*, 1914. 44.

Synodical Conference come to their convention would “result in new complications” and instead of helping would “do harm to the fraternal relations” the Synodical Conference desired. The letter expressed the conviction that there would not be enough time at the Norwegian Synod convention for a thorough discussion of the points the Synodical Conference had raised. Instead the Norwegian Synod appointed a committee of President Hans Stub, Professor Johannes Ylvisaker, and Rev. O. P. Vangsnes to meet at a future date with the Synodical Conference committee.⁵⁸⁷ For various reasons the two committees were never able to meet.⁵⁸⁸ Unfortunately Stub began to accuse the Synodical Conference of having changed its former position on the doctrine of election. He even used the term “New Missouri” to describe the Synodical Conference teaching. This term had been the epithet that Friedrich Schmidt frequently had used some decades before to ridicule Walther’s position.⁵⁸⁹

Even though the committees never met, Franz Pieper published an evaluation of the Madison Settlement with an appeal for Lutheran unity.⁵⁹⁰ Pieper’s evaluation was relatively mild. He noted that the *Opgjør* stated that the “Missourian” view was the doctrine of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions.⁵⁹¹ He declared that it was a great achievement that the *Opgjør* rejected synergism.⁵⁹² He believed that discussions of election and conversion might be quite profitable and that agreement could be reached by a modification of the *Opgjør*.⁵⁹³ He still objected to the “second” form of the doctrine (*intuitu fidei*) as an unscriptural expression that

⁵⁸⁷ The letter is printed in *Synodical Conference Proceedings*, 1914, 38-39.

⁵⁸⁸ For an overview of the various attempts to meet and the correspondence between the Synodical Conference and the Norwegian Synod see *Synodical Conference Proceedings*, 1914, 33-44.

⁵⁸⁹ *Grace for Grace*, 106.

⁵⁹⁰ Pieper’s little book was published in both a German and an English edition. *Zur Einigung der amerikanisch-lutherische Kirche in der Lehre von der Bekerung und Gandewahl* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1913). *Conversion and Election: A Plea for a United Lutheranism in America* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1913). All references are to the English edition.

⁵⁹¹ *A Plea for a United Lutheranism in America*, 12.

⁵⁹² *Ibid.*, 87.

⁵⁹³ *Ibid.*, 131-132.

often provides a convenient cover for synergism.⁵⁹⁴ Pieper also noted that the problem historically was that the two sides had a different theological approach.

In the recent controversy *Bible-text* and exegesis stood in opposition to each other. The other side insisted with much emphasis that the few Scripture-texts treating of Predestination were “obscure,” and must needs be “interpreted” in order that universal grace might be preserved. We on our part maintained that the texts treating of Election are sufficiently *numerous* and *clear*. Just so our Confessions: “Holy Scriptures not only in but one place and incidentally, but in many places, thoroughly discuss and urge the same (doctrine of Election). The texts concerning Predestination require, as little as the *sedes doctrinae* of other articles, an “interpretation” in the sense that obscure words must first be explained. What Luther says concerning Scripture texts for all Christian doctrine applies also to the texts which treat of Election: “When Faith only hears the Bible, it is so clear and bright to him that he says without any fathers or glosses: That is right, that I believe.” We have, on occasion, requested the other side repeatedly to make the test.⁵⁹⁵

The director of the Wisconsin Synod’s seminary, John Schaller (1859-1920), critically commented on the *Opgjør* in the seminary’s theological journal, *Theologische Quartalschrift*.⁵⁹⁶ He objected to the *Opgjør*’s allowing two version of the doctrine of election to stand and the Norwegian Synod’s attitude toward doctrinal differences. The synods of the Synodical Conference were concerned about the theological direction of the Norwegian Synod. Union based on a compromise agreement would result in a break in fellowship between the Synodical Conference and the Norwegian Synod.

There was also a sizeable minority within the Norwegian Synod that objected to the *Opgjør*. The leaders of the minority were Stub’s colleagues at the synod’s seminary in Decorah, J. Ylvisaker, O. E. Brandt, and E. Hove. These three drafted a petition (*Bønnskrift*) which they sent to men who they knew were in agreement with them. They did not attach their names to the document although the recipients knew who sent it to them. They soon identified themselves as the authors. When Stub received a copy he reacted negatively. He and Larsen viewed the petition as an underhanded attack on the agreement they had helped forge. Stub used the fact that

⁵⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 15-16, 71=72.

⁵⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 100.

⁵⁹⁶ John Schaller, “Die Norwegische Sache auf der Synodalkonferenz.” *Theologische Quartalschrift*, vol .9, (October 1912), 269-28; “Die Norwegische Extrasynodalsitzung und ihr Resultat.” Vol. 10, (October 1913), 225-247; “Ein lutherische ‘Opgjør’.” vol 11 #1 (January 1914), 59-60.

the petition had been circulated anonymously to undermine the opponents of the Madison Settlement. The authors of the petition had not had any devious motives in sending the document anonymously. Those who received it knew who had written and sent it. However, their failure initially to affix their names to the document gave Stub fodder to discredit their efforts.

The petition was ultimately printed in the *Kirketidende* and Theodore Graebner published this English summary in the *Lutheran Herald*.

In a preamble the petitioners announced their loyalty to the movement for establishing spiritual unity between Norwegian Lutheran bodies in our country, but express the fear that the doctrinal harmony necessary for fellowship has not yet been attained.

Paragraph 1 points out the undeniable historical fact that the United Church has not announced its agreement with the interpretation of Opgjør adopted by the Synod.

Paragraph 2 refers to the undeniable historical fact that the unfavorable judgment passed by the United Church theologians on the theses on election accepted by the Synod in 1910, has not been retracted. "The men who passed this judgment, and who also accepted Opgjør, have since expressed their views which show that they have not changed their opinion of the Synod's doctrine."

Paragraph 3 points out the differing interpretations of Opgjør.

Paragraph 4 deals with the difficulty caused by the brotherly relations maintained by the United Church with church bodies with which the Synod cannot practice fellowship.

The petitioners, in conclusion, give expression to the hope that no final measures will be adopted, before the difficulties pointed out in this memorial have been removed.⁵⁹⁷

Stub had always maintained that he was upholding the doctrine of election as taught historically in the Norwegian Synod. This was the doctrine of the Synodical Conference and the Missouri Synod. He believed that *Opgjør* contained that teaching. Leaders of the United Church publicly stated the contrary. Kildahl, vice-president of the United Church, stated, "The doctrine contained in the Missouri Synod's reports of the 1877-79 conventions is the doctrine against which we fought; and that doctrine I do not find in *Opgjør*."⁵⁹⁸ In spite of this difference of opinion on what *Opgjør* actually said, Stub seems to have been determined that the union would succeed.

⁵⁹⁷ *Lutheran Herald*, vol. 8, (June 5, 1913), 527-528.

⁵⁹⁸ *Lutheran Herald*, vol. 8, (May 15, 1913), 457.

Stub called a special convention of the Norwegian Synod in 1913 to adopt the settlement that had been reached by representatives of the various synods in Madison. The majority report at the convention urged adoption of *Opgjør*. The minority report expressed hope that nothing would be adopted until the difficulties cited in the *Bønnskrift* of Ylvisaker, Brandt, and Hove were removed. The delegates voted 394 to 106 to approve the majority report. This vote was subject to congregational approval. Stub had been the chief spokesman for the majority position. At the convention he charged the minority with having been irresponsible in both the content of the *Bønnskrift* and in their manner of bringing it forward. He urged the passage of the majority report so that the synod would not be guilty of breaking faith with the United Church and Hauge's Synod. He declared, "Therefore, I urge you as strongly as possible. . . . do not vote for the minority report, but vote for the majority report! Nothing less is involved than the honor of the Norwegian Synod and the cause of union."⁵⁹⁹

As the result of the convention vote and the overwhelming support of the congregations of their synod, the members of the union committee of the Norwegian Synod considered themselves authorized to continue merger talks with Hauge's Synod and United Church. The minority were encouraged in their opposition by the support of Missouri Synod theologians. Stub continued his attempts to win the minority over.

Meanwhile the United Church attempted to broaden the merger movement. The United Church's union committee approached the Lutheran Free Church, the Eielsen Synod, and the Church of Lutheran Brethren to see whether there would be interest in union talks. Longstanding differences with the United Church in doctrine and practice made the replies of each of these three Scandinavian synods less than favorable. In spite of the negative responses the United Church decided to keep the special union committee in the event that any of these synods might eventually reconsider and join the union movement.⁶⁰⁰

⁵⁹⁹ Nelson, *The Lutheran Church among Norwegian-Americans*, vol. 2, 195.

⁶⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 197-199.

Stub set to work to win over the minority in the Norwegian Synod to the merger. Before the 1914 convention of the synod, Stub met with Dr. J. N. Kildahl, the president of the United Church. Kildahl had publicly put a different interpretation on the contents of *Opgjør* than had Stub. Kildahl had also rejected Stub's theses on election in 1910 as teaching false doctrine. Stub reported to the 1914 convention the results of that meeting. The two of them had agreed

1) that paragraph one of "The Settlement" does not speak of two forms of doctrine, but only about the doctrine in two forms, 2) that in paragraph four, the phrase, "sense of responsibility in relation to the acceptance or rejection of grace," does not speak—"neither do the words say it—that a man stands in the same relation to the acceptance of grace as to the rejection of grace, since the reception flows from an entirely different source than the rejection. . . , 3) that in point 6c which speaks of the resistance which God in conversion has taken from those who are saved, it is self-understood that it is God alone, who takes away all resistance which hinders conversion.⁶⁰¹

At the convention Stub also tried to prove that the position expressed in *Opgjør* was no different from what the Norwegian Synod had taught in the 1880s. He quoted from an article written by Herman Amberg Preus in 1883. This article had also been signed by Preus' son, C. K. Preus. C. K. Preus had become a leader of the minority who opposed the acceptance of *Opgjør*. Stub stated

This then, says President Preus and also his son, was clear to the Synod in 1883, that there were two concepts of election in the Lutheran Church, which found expression in two forms of doctrine, which did not stand in conflict with the analogy of faith. Note well these words! And now will some take upon themselves the responsibility for splitting the Synod, as was threatened in the last number of the "Kirketidende," on the ground of a form of doctrine which does not stand in conflict with the analogy of faith?⁶⁰²

Stub's tactics were clever, but his claim was not entirely accurate. In 1883 the Norwegian Synod clearly rejected any implication of synergism in conversion. They accepted the way election *intuitu fidei* was explained by the great Lutheran dogmatician, John Gerhard.⁶⁰³ The *Opgjør*, however, stated that unregenerate man had a "sense of responsibility in the relation to the acceptance of or rejection of grace." The Norwegian Synod in 1883 would have rejected the idea

⁶⁰¹ *Beretning. . . Synoden, 1914*, 53-54. English translation in Aaberg, *A City Set on a Hill*, 58-59

⁶⁰² *Beretning. . . Synoden, 1914*, 56-57. English translation in Aaberg, *A City Set on a Hill*, 59-60.

⁶⁰³ See Koren, "An Accounting" in *Grace for Grace*, 183-184. This essay was presented in 1884.

that an unregenerate man, dead in transgressions in sins, could have a sense of responsibility toward accepting or rejection grace.

Stub also reported that the congregations of the synod had overwhelmingly approved the union proposals ratified by the 1912 convention.

Although there was considerable discussion of the union committee report, the vote at the 1914 convention was overwhelmingly in favor of the proposed articles of union. The articles were adopted 360 to 170. The vote of the pastors present was 138 for and 96 against. The laymen favored the proposal by a greater majority, 223 in favor to 74 against.⁶⁰⁴

The special convention of the Norwegian Synod in 1915 was free from strife. Although the resolutions of the union committee together with the constitution that had been proposed for the new merged synod were read at the convention, the delegates did not discuss them.⁶⁰⁵

The special synod convention held in Minneapolis May 18-24, 1916, proved to be the decisive convention for the merger movement in the Norwegian Synod. The atmosphere was tense and charged with emotions. "An animated discussion, in which professors, pastors, and laymen gave heated expression to their views, revealed that the two sides were in no compromising mood."⁶⁰⁶ A month before the convention Stub had sent out a 48 page pamphlet which attacked those who opposed church union on the basis of the *Opgjør*. This pamphlet, "The Course of the Union Movement," was intended as a supplement to the April 19, 1916, issue of *Kirketidende*. It was not intended to calm the troubled waters at the convention, but to undermine the position of the minority. The minority responded with a pamphlet of their own, "An Answer to Rebukes."⁶⁰⁷

Pastor I. B. Torrison presented a substitute motion when the proposal of the union committee was presented to the convention. Some 94 delegates had signed this proposal. The

⁶⁰⁴ Aaberg, *A City Set on a Hill*, 60.

⁶⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 60-61.

⁶⁰⁶ Nelson, *The Lutheran Church among Norwegian-Americans*. vol. 2, 214.

⁶⁰⁷ *Grace for Grace*, 113.

substitute motion asked that three changes be made to the *Opgjør*: 1) to strike paragraph one, 2) to make the reference to the *Formula of Concord* in paragraph three to include paragraphs 1-20 (not just 10-20), and 3) to delete the words “acceptance of” in paragraph four so that the paragraph would only speak about man’s responsibility in regard to the rejection of grace. The resolution also called on Hauge’s Synod and the United Church to make the same changes and to postpone the adoption of the constitution until these conditions were met.

After a long debate the substitute motion was tabled and the vote was taken on the union proposals. The convention voted to adopt the proposed constitution 520-203. The motion to proceed with the union with the United Church even if the Hauge’s Synod chose not to carried by a margin of 491-187. The motion to incorporate the new church and turn all of the synod’s property over to it passed 482-181.⁶⁰⁸

The minority, however, did not give up hope that they might be heard. In August of 1916 they began publishing a semi-monthly periodical, *Retlegning og Forsvar*, to give voice to their doctrinal concerns and complaints about the arbitrary actions of the majority. A three-man committee had been elected to act for the minority before and after the convention. This committee published a statement during the 1916 convention which set forth their intentions in the light of the proceedings at the convention.

On the one hand there is a resolute majority which regards the question of union as settled. . . On the other side stands a considerable and equally resolute Minority. I cannot with a clear conscience enter the new church before the required corrections are made in the *Opgjør*. The Minority has never been so strong, so unanimous, so firm as now . . .

Our answer is that we must try to right that which is wrong and in the meantime continue our work in the Synod as heretofore. This is our plain duty and our right according to the Synod’s constitution.

Our schools and other institutions which we have founded and supported at considerable sacrifice, we must also maintain and guard, as our above-quoted joint declaration states.

That a split may be avoided is meanwhile our earnest prayer. The other church bodies will now soon have their meetings. We do not know what will happen. The Lord rules.

⁶⁰⁸ Aaberg, *A City Set on a Hill*, 61-62.

We still have our synod. Let us do our work in it and let the evil of each day be sufficient unto it.

If the difficulties cannot be removed, there will be enough congregations which will remain in the Synod so that it will be able to live and assert its great principle: "The Word alone and Grace alone." No synod resolution can force a congregation out of the Synod and into a new church body. This is a matter which the congregation alone can decide.⁶⁰⁹

By the time of the 1917 convention most of the minority changed their position on entering the merger. Representatives of the minority had been meeting with the Joint Committee of the three synods in another attempt to have the changes which they had been suggesting made to the *Opgjør*. The result of these efforts was the so-called Austin Agreement or Settlement. This was the agreement which led many in the minority who had been opposing a merger based on the *Opgjør* to change their minds.

After the Norwegian Synod met in convention in Minneapolis in 1916 there was some concern that so large a minority in the Norwegian Synod still opposed the merger. Therefore representatives of the United Church met with representatives of the minority to see if there might be a meeting of the minds. The friendly nature of the meeting moved Professor C. K. Preus and Rev. I. B. Torrison of the minority to address a letter to the joint committee on union once again asking for a modification of the *Opgjør*. They wrote

There are three things in the "*Opgjør*" adopted by the annual meetings of the United Church, Hauge's Synod, and the Synod, which the minority of the synod find they cannot for conscience sake subscribe to. . . would it be possible for the three churches to adopt an agreement with us in which these three things which cause us scruples are omitted or changed, viz.: Paragraph 1 of "*Opgjør*" is omitted; "0" in the reference in paragraph 3 is omitted so that it reads "Art. II, 1-20," instead of "Art. II, 10-20," and that the last part of paragraph 4 is changed so that it reads "or on the other hand weaken man's feeling of responsibility over against the rejection of grace," instead of: "or on the other hand weaken man's feeling of responsibility over against the acceptance or rejection of grace."

If the union committee could recommend this for adoption by the respective churches, we have hopes they would vote for it.

If this request or resolution is adopted, it is our intention to join the union, assist in its consummation, do what we can to induce as many as possible to join, and labor to the end that it may become a blessing to the Lutheran church.⁶¹⁰

⁶⁰⁹ *Grace for Grace*, 114-115.

⁶¹⁰ J.E. Thoen, "The 'Austin Agreement,'" *Lutheran Sentinel*, vol. 8, (May 6, 1925), 276.

Preus and Torrison met with the union committee on October 10, 1916, but the union committee denied the request of the minority on the basis of legal advice that the request might hinder the union. The union committee appointed a subcommittee, Professor Wee, Rev. Tangjerd, and Rev. I.D. Ylvisaker, to meet with Preus and Torrison that same evening. The subcommittee proposed a plan whereby the minority could express their reservations and still join the new church. Preus and Torrison rejected the proposal.

The subcommittee then sent Preus and Torrison a letter suggesting that the method of procedure proposed by the minority's request could not be followed because "it would cause misunderstandings, and difficulties and contention, since it is impossible to base consolidation on two unlike agreements of which the last adopted would necessarily supplant and supersede the first." The letter said that the committee was willing to present to the annual meetings of the three synods this proposal:

While the annual meeting retains "*Opgjør*" unchanged as a basis for consolidation of the three negotiating churches and, while the annual meeting is expressly aware of the three reservations concerning paragraphs one, three and four of "*Opgjør*," which is contained in the request from Prof. C. K. Preus and Rev. I. B. Torrison, the annual meeting nevertheless invites that group of men and congregations, whose views are expressed in the above mentioned request, to join in forming the new church under complete equality and mutual fraternal recognition.⁶¹¹

In other words, the subcommittee was taking note of the objections to the "*Opgjør*," but was inviting the minority to join anyway. They evidently did not think that the minority's objections were divisive of fellowship. Preus and Torrison did not accept the invitation.

A new subcommittee was appointed (Dr. Kildahl, Professor Wee, and Rev. Jordahl) and met with Preus and Torrison in Austin, Minnesota. This committee modified the invitation by including the following paragraphs.

The annual meeting is expressly aware of the three reservations concerning paragraphs one, three and four of "*Opgjør*," contained in a request from Prof. C.K. Preus and Rev. I.B. Torrison, and declares that in said request nothing is found which contradicts the Scriptures and Confessions, but regards the position expressed in the above quoted

⁶¹¹ *Ibid.*, 277.

request as an adequate expression for unity of faith, wherefore that group of men and congregations, whose position is declared in the above quoted request, are invited to join the new church under complete equality and mutual fraternal recognition.

Note: it is self evident that the above stated resolution must not be interpreted to mean that “*Opgjør*” as the basis for union between the three contracting churches, is thereby abbreviated or changed.⁶¹²

This resolution became known as the “Invitation.” The “Austin Agreement” was the *Opgjør* with the changes suggested by the minority. The problem was that the three merging churches never adopted the Austin Agreement, yet most of the minority joined the merger on the basis of the Austin Agreement.

Preus and Torrison called for a meeting of the minority in January of 1917. Between 150 and 200 pastors and laymen attended. The two men informed the group that the United Church and the majority in the Norwegian Synod had shown a different attitude and seemed willing to yield to the “minimum demand” of the minority. On hearing this, the minority adopted this resolution.

The joint committee of the three negotiating churches has in accordance with an agreement between the subcommittee and Prof. C.K. Preus and Rev. I.B. Torrison resolved to recommend to the respective annual meetings a resolution to extend an invitation to those men and congregations, who share the views of said persons to join the union.

The invitation acknowledges the attitude of the minority, since it does not find therein anything to contradict Scripture or the Confessions, but regards it as an adequate expression of unity of faith, and gives the expression “responsibility over against the acceptance or rejection of grace” a satisfactory explanation.

It is self-evident that the note attached to the invitation does not alter or contradict its contents.

The minority hereby accepts the invitation, beseeching God to guide this move that it might be a blessing to His church.⁶¹³

The minority elected Preus, Torrison, and a layman Hon. L.S. Swenson, to present the minority’s resolution to the joint committee. Unfortunately, Preus and Torrison were unable to attend and Swenson, according to the official records, said that the resolution constituted an

⁶¹² *Ibid.*, 277-278.

⁶¹³ *Ibid.*, 282.

acceptance of the invitation to join the merger. The resolution did not contradict anything in the invitation nor did it need to be published or submitted to the annual meetings of the three merging churches.⁶¹⁴

Most of the minority pastors and congregations joined the merger on the basis of the Austin Agreement. One wonders whether they knew or did not care that this agreement was never adopted by the three synods participating in the merger.

A large minority in Hauge's Synod was also opposed to the merger. Their reasons, however, had little or nothing to do with the *Opgjør*. Low church worship practices and the pietistic emphasis on rebirth led some to fear that the Haugean spirit would be lost in the merger. Some were afraid that the merger would result in having unworthy communicants and "unconverted" ministers in the church. In June of 1916 Hauge's Synod met in Redwing, Minnesota. A schism was forestalled by an interpretation of the articles of union which enabled the minority to enter the union without giving up cherished hopes and practices. The articles of union prohibited unionism and cooperation with non-Lutheran groups. The interpretation defined cooperation in a way that permitted occasional exchange of pulpits and occasional sharing of the Lord's Supper with those outside their fellowship. Members of Hauge's Synod were free to participate in ecumenical mission societies and movements like the Student Volunteer Movement. The minority was assured that they could retain non-liturgical worship and, in fact, their way of worship was on an equal plain with the liturgical worship of the Norwegian Synod and the United Church. The *Opgjør*, the articles of union, and the proposed constitution were then adopted by a sizeable majority vote.⁶¹⁵

The union movement among the Norwegians must also be seen against the background of the times. The later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw a downplaying of doctrinal differences for the sake cooperation across denominational lines. The Edinburgh Missionary

⁶¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 282-283.

⁶¹⁵ Nelson, *The Lutheran Church among Norwegian-Americans*. vol. 2, 212-214.

Conference in 1910 is often viewed as the beginning of the modern ecumenical movement, a movement which stressed religious and doctrinal commonalities rather than differences.

As the 400th anniversary of Luther's posting of the 95 Theses approached, Lutheran mergers and the spirit of cooperation among Lutherans in America advanced. The Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan, and Nebraska Synods merged in 1917 to form the present Wisconsin Synod.⁶¹⁶ This merger was based on agreement in doctrine and practice. In 1918 there was a much larger merger involving the various synods of the General Synod, the General Council and the United Synod, South, to form the United Lutheran Church in America (ULCA). This merger was based on the desire to put past differences behind without fully settling those differences. The way was prepared for merger by joint work on the Common Service, a standard version of Luther's Small Catechism (1899), a common hymnal (1917), and a book of ministerial acts (1918).⁶¹⁷

In 1918 the National Lutheran Council was founded to promote joint work among Lutherans serving in the armed forces and to speak with a united voice on issues of the day. Participants included ULCA, Norwegian Lutheran Church, Augustana Synod, Lutheran Free Church, United Danish Lutheran Church, Danish Lutheran Church in America., Icelandic Synod, Ohio Synod, Iowa Synod, and Buffalo Synod. This cooperation was spurred by the notion that they were now all "American" church bodies with loyalty to the United States. Relief work following World War I entailed cooperation among members of the National Lutheran Council even those member synods that were not in fellowship with each other.⁶¹⁸

The spirit of the times favored cooperation and merger in spite of doctrinal differences.

The three synods ended their separate existence on June 8, 1917. The first convention of the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America (later renamed the Evangelical Lutheran Church) was held June 9-14, 1917, in Minneapolis, Minnesota. "The merger was finalized . . . to a great

⁶¹⁶ Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*. 119-131.

⁶¹⁷ Nelson, *The Lutherans in North America*. 373-377.

⁶¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 399-410.

deal of popular acclaim on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean and the heartbreaking dismay of the Minority”⁶¹⁹ in the Norwegian Synod. The spirit of the times downplayed doctrinal differences in favor of outward unity. Hans Stub, the president of the Norwegian Synod and prime mover in the union movement, was elected the first president of the new synod.

A small number of pastors and laymen from the Norwegian Synod who could not in clear conscience enter the new church body met at the Hotel Aberdeen in St. Paul. They were joined by the Synodical Conference committee which had come to the Norwegian Synod convention in an attempt to carry out the directive to meet with representatives of the Synod in a last attempt to dissuade them from merging on the basis of a compromise agreement. The members of the Synodical Conference committee included Dr. Franz Pieper and Dr. W.H.T. Dau of Concordia Seminary in St. Louis and Professor Theodor Schlueter of Northwestern College in Watertown, Wisconsin. The Synodical Conference committee had requested a meeting with the Norwegian Synod prior to the 1917 convention but their offer was declined. Stub wrote

The request made by you as the committee appointed by the Synodical Conference to confer with the Norwegian Synod or any representatives of the same in regard to the Madison Settlement, has been received. I brought this matter of the meeting of our committee with your committee before our Church Council, asking its advice. The Church Council declared unanimously that it would not be advisable or expedient to have any meeting before the convention in June, when the three Norwegian bodies will unite into one large church. The time requested by you is too short. We have larger and smaller meetings nearly all the time, in order to prepare for the large convention. Furthermore we have regarded it as our duty to take care of our church matters and try to finish them before we begin conferences and other meetings with other synods. After our meeting in June we shall have time to meet with you, and the Synodical Conference does not meet before August next year. The convention in June may appoint one more member on our committee (we are only two at present), or may appoint another committee to deal with your committee.⁶²⁰

Stub also declared that the Synodical Conference had done the Norwegian Synod an “injustice” by publishing the report of the Norwegian Synod minority in the proceedings of the Synodical Conference convention that had taken place in Toledo, Ohio. He continued to call it an anonymous report.

⁶¹⁹ Larsen and Madson, *Built on the Rock*, 59.

⁶²⁰ *Synodical Conference Proceedings*, 1920. 18.

This report is by us regarded as entirely unreliable, and we do not know who is responsible for it. By spreading this report among members of the Synodical Conference you certainly have given them the impression that our last Synod meeting must have been “eine Raeubersynode.” The Church Council was unanimously of the opinion that this act of yours was an unfriendly act.⁶²¹

Stub’s reluctance to meet with the Synodical Conference committee is understandable in the light of all the preparations that were necessary for the upcoming convention. However, in the year following the convention Stub informed the Synodical Conference that the merged synod had no desire at this time to meet with representatives of the Synodical Conference.

Although the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America through its chosen representatives gladly would meet a similar committee of representatives of the Synodical Conference and discuss the doctrines of God’s Word with the end in view of coming to an understanding and mutual recognition, the Church Council nevertheless is of the opinion that the opportune time for such a colloquium is hardly at hand. It might easily lead to new controversies and complications, if we were already at this time, immediately after the union, to commence new discussions about the doctrine of election.

Our people desire and need peace and rest, and the Church Council therefore, through its President, desires to submit to the dear brethren of the Synodical Conference to postpone negotiations indefinitely, so that our Church, which lately, through the wonderful providence of God has terminated a controversy of many years’ duration, may have time to be strengthened in the unity of faith and brotherly understanding, which by the aid of God we have attained.⁶²²

The Synodical Conference committee was nevertheless going to travel to the Twin Cities before the convention to meet with representatives of the minority and informed Stub of their plans.

We also note that your Church Council feels that an injustice has been done to them by our committee’s report to the Synodical Conference at Toledo in 1916. Our committee is ready to answer any specific charges that may be brought against it because of this report. We suggest that the proper time to discuss this matter would be at our forthcoming meeting.

In order that no false construction may be put on our action, we wish to advise you that we have been requested to meet at St. Paul with a number of our Norwegian brethren who desire a conference with us. Our commission from the Synodical Conference, both at Milwaukee in 1914 and at Toledo in 1916, instructs us to heed such requests.⁶²³

⁶²¹ *Ibid.*, 20

⁶²² *Ibid.*, 20-21.

⁶²³ *Ibid.*, 18-19.

No doubt the Synodical Conference committee still had hope of speaking with the Norwegian Synod leadership prior to the convention, but no such meeting was forthcoming. A representative of the Norwegian Synod, Dr. O.E. Brandt, had told Dr. Dau “that now was not the time and that nothing could be accomplished.” Franz Pieper is reported to have told the minority in these meetings in the hotel before the convention, “What I am especially interested in is that you *testify*. Your testimony may not bear fruit for a hundred years, but it will bear fruit.”⁶²⁴

The minority decided to rebuild the old Norwegian Synod on the synod’s old foundation. They elected interim officers, but did not officially organize as a synod because they wanted and needed the approval of their congregations. Pastor Bjug Harstad of Parkland, Washington, was elected president. Harstad had founded the school which became Pacific Lutheran University. That school remained with the merged synod. Pastor John A. Moldstad of Chicago was elected vice-president. Pastor C. N. Peterson of Minneapolis was elected secretary and Pastor O. T. Lee Northwood, Iowa, was elected treasurer. Lee died some nine months later.

The group decided to publish a bi-monthly periodical, *Luthersk Tidende* (*Lutheran Times*). The April 1, 1918, issue contained this notice: “Pastors and members of congregations who desire to continue in the old doctrine and practice of the Norwegian Synod will, God willing, hold their annual meeting in the Lime Creek congregation, Pastor H. Ingebritson’s charge, June 14 and following days.”⁶²⁵ Lime Creek is in Winnebago County, Iowa, close to the Minnesota border.

Thirteen pastors and approximately 200 others gathered for the founding convention of the “Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church.” However, because the governor of Iowa in the heat of the nativism that was so prominent during World War I had decreed that only English could be used in public gatherings, the group had to travel about one

⁶²⁴ John A. Moldstad, “Lest We Forget,” *Lutheran Sentin.* vol. 26, (April 27, 1943), 114.

⁶²⁵ Larson and Madson, *Built on the Rock*, 64-66.

mile north into Minnesota and hold their convention in a tent. The delegates passed the following resolutions unanimously and recommended them to their congregations for adoption.

1. The name of this organization shall be The Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church.
2. The only source and rule for faith and doctrine is the word of God as revealed in the canonical books of the Old and New Testament.
3. The Norwegian Synod adopts as its confession all the symbolical books of the Lutheran Church contained in the Book of Concord.
4. We elect a committee of three to propose the necessary changes in the old constitution of the Synod. The committee report shall be published as soon as possible, in order that congregations so wishing can consider and adopt it. The committee report [is] to be prepared for final adoption at the next annual meeting of the Synod.⁶²⁶

The convention re-elected the interim officers with Pastor A. J. Torgerson of Northwood, Iowa, replacing the deceased Pastor Lee as treasurer.

In 1919 the little Norwegian Synod⁶²⁷ applied for membership in the Synodical Conference. The old Norwegian Synod had withdrawn from the Synodical Conference in the midst of the Election Controversy without severing fellowship with the members of the Synodical Conference. Reacting to the application of the little Norwegian Synod, the Synodical Conference passed this resolution in 1920.

1. *Resolved*, That the Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Synod be accepted as a member of the Ev. Luth. Synodical Conference of North America.
2. *Resolved*, That we welcome these brethren with great joy, encouraging them in their fight for the truth, and wish them God's richest blessings for the future.
3. To our great sorrow we are compelled to state that "The Synod for the Norwegian Ev. Luth. Church of America," by holding fast to the *Opgjør* and its union with the other two Norwegian synods in "The Norwegian Lutheran Church of America," has severed its bond of faith and church-fellowship with the Synodical Conference.⁶²⁸

The Synodical Conference *Proceedings* notes that 30 pastors and 20 congregations belonged to the new synod. The Synodical Conference had suffered significant losses as a result of the Election Controversy. The reception of the little Norwegian Synod brought joy to the three

⁶²⁶ *Ibid.*, 66-68. There is a typographical error in point three of the resolutions which I have corrected. The resolution as printed in *Built on a Rock* reads "all the symbolical books of the Old and New Testament." See Aaberg, *A City Set on a Hill*, 78.

⁶²⁷ For many years after the founding of this synod it was called the "little" Norwegian Synod by members of the Synodical Conference to distinguish it from its predecessor and from the merged synod.

⁶²⁸ *Synodical Conference Proceedings*, 1920. 23

other members of the conference. In 1920 the Synodical Conference consisted of the Missouri Synod, the newly merged Joint Synod of Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan and Other States, the Slovak Synod, and the newly established Norwegian Synod. The doctrines of election and fellowship continued to divide the Synodical Conference from other Midwestern Lutheran synods.

Conclusion

Norwegian Lutherans brought with them to America a number of theological tendencies and divisions from the Lutheran Church in Norway. These divisions were amplified in America and the divisions were exacerbated by the Election Controversy.

However, a number of factors promoted a desire for union. There was a rising tide of Norwegian pride expressed in cultural and choral societies. The *bygdelag* movement contributed a sense of unity among Norwegian-Americans. The fact that in spite of the doctrinal controversy the United Church and the Norwegian Synod formed a joint committee in 1908 to produce an English hymnal and service book demonstrated a desire for union and the belief that union would be forthcoming. *The Lutheran Hymnary* of 1912 fostered the union spirit. Pride in Norwegian heritage and growing Americanization both contributed to the union spirit.

Laymen began voicing a desire for union, expressing a weariness over continuing doctrinal controversy. Many pastors were also tired of the theological battles. Relatively minor concessions in the wording of doctrinal statements began to satisfy them. Since most wanted union, many were reluctant to say anything that might hinder it. Others believed that the doctrine of election could legitimately be expressed in different ways. The almost universal use of Pontoppidan's exposition of Luther's *Small Catechism* among Norwegian-American Lutherans made most comfortable with the expression, election *intuitu fidei*.

A change in leadership in the Norwegian Synod fostered the union. Hans Stub did everything in his power to silence and suppress opposition and to promote the merger. The spirit

of the times encouraged cooperation across denominational lines and merger without settling previous doctrinal differences.

The Madison Settlement allowed those who had been on opposite sides during the Election Controversy to join in a new church by declaring that the doctrine of election could be appropriately expressed in two different ways. The Madison Settlement and the subsequent Austin Agreement did not really settle the Election Controversy but stated that the differences were not divisive of fellowship. This action showed a departure from the historic Lutheran understanding of the importance of full agreement in doctrine before church fellowship can be expressed.

A small minority refused to go along with the merger because they believed that the *Opgjør* had not settled past differences but was allowing doctrinal error to be tolerated. That minority organized as a synod in 1918 and joined the Synodical Conference in 1920.

About the time of the Norwegian merger a new grassroots effort arose among the German American Lutheran synods in the Midwest which nearly succeeded in bringing about a resolution to the Election Controversy. Unlike the Norwegian effort the new attempt to resolve the controversy failed because one side was unwilling to allow ambiguous statements to cloak doctrinal disagreement and because of the desire to uphold historic confessional Lutheran fellowship principles.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE INTERSYNODICAL MOVEMENT AND THE CHICAGO (INTERSYNODICAL) THESES

In the early twentieth century a rather remarkable grassroots effort developed in Minnesota in an attempt to resolve the Election Controversy. The movement grew at a rapid pace and almost succeeded in bringing about union on the basis of real agreement in doctrine. At least one scholar, however, has suggested that the effort was misguided and doomed from the start.⁶²⁹ Others have praised this effort highly. Wisconsin Synod historian Edward Fredrich writes,

When the writer had occasion some years back to travel every fortnight from New Ulm to Arlington and through Winthrop and Gaylord, he never did so without paying a silent tribute to the dozen or so pastors willing to meet in the hot Minnesota summer in the cause of Lutheran unity. They did what they could. They pushed the venture beyond the little towns in their rural county to a state wide and even Midwestern movement. It was no fault of theirs that the effort finally failed in 1929. They put their hearts and hands into the cause and at the same time respected the consciences of brethren less involved and informed.⁶³⁰

This chapter will offer an overview of the Intersynodical Movement to determine why the venture failed to attain its goal of bringing about a settlement of the controversy that divided Midwestern Lutheranism. Several answers will be proposed. The spirit of the times fostered union at the price of true doctrinal unity. Doctrinal indifference was on the rise. The Iowa Synod's historic position on "open questions" led to a willingness to ignore certain doctrinal differences while the synods of the Synodical Conference insisted on full doctrinal unity for expressions of church fellowship. Members of the Intersynodical Committee were perhaps not always on the same page as others in their respective synods.

⁶²⁹ Paul S. Meitner, *Strangers to Sisters: The Growth of Fraternal Relations between the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod between 1917-1955*. A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Division of Church History in Candidacy for the Degree of Master of Sacred Theology. Mequon Wisconsin, 2010. 93.

⁶³⁰ Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*. 176.

Reformation Anniversaries, Lutheran Mergers, and Movements

Most Lutheran groups that immigrated to America formed synods in this country. These synods were usually formed on the basis of country or region of origin in the Old World, language, or geographical area in America. Some synods were founded because of distinctive doctrinal issues or practices. From colonial times through the twentieth century probably as many as 150 separate synods were established.⁶³¹ In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries these synods began to participate in common movements, federations, and synodical mergers.

The motivation behind these movements, organizations, and mergers took different forms. The main reason often was economy and efficient use of money and manpower. Since Lutherans placed an emphasis on public doctrine and confession, doctrinal issues usually had to be addressed. Theological professors and synodical leaders were often cautious. Laymen often took the lead in promoting joint work. The spirit of the times in America downplayed doctrinal differences and distinctions for the sake of outward union. In some synods the ecumenical spirit was strong. Other groups maintained that there could be no outward union without doctrinal agreement.

One observer in 1929 pointed to the spirit of the times in America that emphasized the prestige of bigness. After noting the upcoming merger of the Ohio, Iowa, and Buffalo synods and the completed merger of the Synod of New York and New England, New York Ministerium, and the Synod of New York, he discussed a proposed merger of three ULCA seminaries in the state of Pennsylvania.

In our estimation, the real sentiments underlying the desire for merging cropped out most unblushingly on the floor of the Maryland Synod: "Merging is in the thought of all people today. Little congregations, synods and institutions are thinking in larger terms. It does not mean that much to be able to say that one comes from this little institution, or that; it will mean much to be able to say that one comes from the United Lutheran Church's Seminary."

⁶³¹ Frank S. Mead and Samuel S. Hill, *Handbook of Denominations in the United States*, 11th edition revised by Craig D. Atwood (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 205.

We conclude by quoting the opening sentences of Harold Butcher's report to the "Lutheran" on the merger of the three eastern synods mentioned above: "This is the day of mergers. The merging of business organizations has become a commonplace. The same tendency is evident in the church."⁶³²

Interest in joint work and mergers was also spurred on by anniversaries of major events in the history of Lutheranism. The 400th anniversary of the Luther's posting of the 95 Theses in 1917 and the 400th anniversary of the presentation on the Augsburg Confession in 1930 were particularly significant. This Lutheran consciousness aroused the desire for Lutheran unity in America and Lutheran union.

Although the free conferences of the first decade of the twentieth century had ended in failure, both Ohio and Missouri expressed interest in continuing intersynodical meetings to seek a resolution to the doctrinal controversies that had divided Midwestern Lutheranism. In 1912 the Ohio Synod adopted this resolution. "We recommend (a) that intersynodical conferences within smaller circles be encouraged, as these may be of great benefit, if conducted in a proper and judicious manner."⁶³³ In 1914 the Missouri Synod expressed similar interest and authorized the president of the synod to appoint a committee to investigate the desirability of resuming such conferences.⁶³⁴

As 1917 approached merger talks increased. The Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan, and Nebraska synods merged in 1917 to form the present Wisconsin Synod.⁶³⁵ This merger was based on agreement in doctrine and practice among synods which were already members of the Synodical Conference and had been cooperating in a federation known as Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan, and Other States. Before the merger took place the Michigan Synod and the Michigan District Synod had to reunite after splitting over practical

⁶³² John P. Meyer, "Merging." *Theologische Quartalschrift*. 26, (Oct 1929), 276.

⁶³³ *The Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Ohio and Other States, Minutes*, 1912. 118.

⁶³⁴ *Missouri Synod, Proceedings*, 1914 (English), 53.

⁶³⁵ *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, 119-131.

issues involving ministerial education.⁶³⁶

Prior to the merger of Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan, and Nebraska another movement appeared, the so-called *Laienbewegung*.⁶³⁷ This movement began in 1913 as an attempt to merge the Wisconsin Synod and Missouri Synod. As the movement progressed it aimed at uniting the constituent synods of the Synodical Conference into state synods based on definite geographical boundaries. In the 1870s there was a similar suggestion in the Synodical Conference that had been backed by C. F. W. Walther. At that time the plan went nowhere because of opposition to certain provisions in Wisconsin and foot dragging in Ohio. When the Election Controversy broke out the state synod proposal died.

In 1913 it appeared that the time was right for a new state synod proposal. The proposal came from laymen in Milwaukee and Racine although it received the support of many pastors. Professor J. P. Koehler of the Wisconsin Synod's seminary in Wauwatosa lent his support to the idea and served on the committee that the laymen organized to pursue their goal. Koehler's colleagues, John Schaller and August Pieper were not in favor. Pieper reportedly called it a *Bauernrevolution*, a peasants' rebellion. President Gustav Bergemann issued a protest not necessarily because he was against the proposal, but because a proposal that would affect the organization of the Wisconsin Synod was bypassing proper synodical channels. In the Wauwatosa seminary student body the opinion was that the movement would succeed. Seminary senior Immanuel P. Frey expressed that opinion in a letter to his fiancée.

In the afternoon three of us attended a meeting of congregation members of the different Milwaukee churches. The purpose of those meetings is to combine the Wisc. and Missouri Synods into one Synod. It certainly would be a good idea if this could be accomplished. I don't doubt that it will be accomplished eventually, but it will take four or five years to do it.⁶³⁸

⁶³⁶ John M. Brenner, "The Michigan Synod Separation and Reunion." *WELS Historical Institute Journal*, 28, (Fall 2010), 5-36.

⁶³⁷ See Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 239-240. Koehler attended the various meetings and gives a firsthand account of the proceedings. The summary of the movement is based on Koehler's account.

⁶³⁸ Letter from Immanuel P. Frey to Elizabeth Janz, March 11, 1913. A copy of the letter is in the author's possession.

The proposal of the *Laienbewegung* faded as the merger of Wisconsin, Minnesota, Minnesota, and Nebraska (also prompted by laymen) into the present-day Wisconsin Synod progressed.

The large Norwegian merger discussed in the previous chapter also took place in 1917. This merger was based on the compromise agreement known as the *Opgjør* or Madison Settlement.

In 1918 there was a much larger merger involving the various synods of the General Synod, the General Council, and the General Synod, South, to form the United Lutheran Church in America (ULCA). This merger was based on the desire to put past differences behind without fully settling those differences. The way was prepared for merger by joint work on the Common Service, a standard version of Luther's Small Catechism (1899), a common hymnal (1917), and a book of ministerial acts (1918).⁶³⁹ A committee had been appointed for a joint celebration of the 400th anniversary of the Reformation. Already in 1914 that committee considered the suggestion that these three federations work toward a merger. At the time the committee declined because the members did not believe the committee had the power or authorization for such a monumental undertaking. On the final day the committee met (April 18, 1917) laymen once again suggested a merger. This time the presidents of the three federations supported the suggestion and proceeded at once to bring the merger to fruition.

In 1918 the National Lutheran Council was founded to promote joint work among Lutherans serving in the armed forces and to speak with a united voice on issues of the day. Participants included the ULCA, Norwegian Lutheran Church, Augustana Synod, Lutheran Free Church, United Danish Lutheran Church, Danish Lutheran Church in America, Icelandic Synod, Ohio Synod, Iowa Synod, and Buffalo Synod. This cooperation was spurred by the notion that they were now all "American" church bodies with loyalty to the United States. Relief work

⁶³⁹ *The Lutherans in North America*, 373-377.

following World War I entailed cooperation among members of the National Lutheran Council even when those member synods were not in fellowship with each other.⁶⁴⁰

In 1930 the Ohio Synod, the Iowa Synod, and the Buffalo Synod merged to form the American Lutheran Church (ALC). That same year the American Lutheran Church helped to form a new federation, the American Lutheran Conference (also abbreviated ALC). This federation included the Augustana Synod, the Norwegian Lutheran Church (later called the Evangelical Lutheran Church or ELC), the Lutheran Free Church (LFC), and the United Evangelical Lutheran Church (UELCH). The majority in the Augustana Synod were descendants of Swedish immigrants. Danish immigrants were the founders of the UELCH. The Lutheran Free Church and the ELC were comprised of Norwegian immigrants. The formation of the American Lutheran Conference would help doom the efforts of the Intersynodical Movement to resolve the election controversy.

The Intersynodical Movement

On May 11, 1915, a conference of Missouri Synod and Wisconsin Synod pastors meeting in rural Sibley County, Minnesota, began to consider how they might celebrate the 400th anniversary of the Reformation in 1917. According to a contemporary report, this meeting marked the beginnings of the Intersynodical Movement. The pastor of the host congregation for the conference, St. John in Fort Ridgely, offers this explanation.

The first impetus toward these unity efforts was given there. It has long been a byword, how much annoyance, trouble, and unnecessary work could be spared us right here in Sibley County, where parish boundaries are completely entangled in one another, if the separated Lutheran synods, instead of mutually denouncing each other as heretics and combating one another, were to work hand in hand for the upbuilding of the Church.⁶⁴¹

⁶⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 399-410.

⁶⁴¹ Peter Schlemmer, "The Current Unity Attempts in the Lutheran Church," *Synodal-Bericht. Verhandlung der Zweite Versammlung des Minnesota-Distrikts der Allgemeine Synode von Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan, und andere Staaten. Gehalten in der Evang.-Luth. Immannuels-Kirche zu Mankato, Minneosta vom 24-30, Juni, 1920.* (Milwaukee, Northwestern Publishing House 1920), 21. (hereafter, *Minnesota District Proceedings, 1920*). The entire report is printed on pages 18-62 in the *Proceedings*. All references will be to the German version contained in the District Proceedings. The English version is

In July 1915 Pastor August Hertwig of the Missouri Synod sent out an invitation to the members of the mixed conference in Sibley County and to the pastors of the Ohio Synod in Sibley and the neighboring counties, to appear at an intersynodical conference to be held in his congregation's school. Only a small group attended this July 12 meeting but the participants thought that there was hope for mutual understanding. Hertwig therefore sent out a notice of another meeting to be held on July 28 in Gaylord. The *Gaylord Hub* printed this report of the meeting:

An unofficial conference of ministers of Lutheran congregations in this section was held at this place on Wednesday, July 28th, pastors of the Missouri, Minnesota, and Ohio synods being present. The meetings were held at the Immanuel Lutheran parochial school building in the forenoon and afternoon and the conference was called for the purpose of forming a closer acquaintance and discussing matters of importance concerning church matters. Free discussions were held and all present were called on during the sessions.⁶⁴²

The group chose Pastor George Diemer to chair the conference and Pastor H.W. Krull to be secretary. Both men served Ohio Synod congregations. The conference set as its goal unity based on Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions. The group discussed the doctrine of salvation with specific emphasis on the doctrines of conversion and election. The meeting was profitable enough that a third meeting was scheduled for August 25 in Winthrop. In order to have a guide for discussion the group suggested that the recent Norwegian Madison Settlement or *Opgjør* be used. Most Midwestern synods were already in the process of studying and reacting to this document.

an unpublished translation by the late Pastor John Weaver-Hudson. Every historical account of the first years of the Intersynodical Movement is dependent on this record by Schlemmer.

⁶⁴² *Gaylord Hub*, July 30, 1915. The paper names the following participants: A. Hertwig of Gaylord; Henry Boettcher of Gibbon; Theo. Rolf of New Germany; M. F. Abraham of Arlington; Carl Reuter of Green Isle; H. Prigge of Mountville; C. G. Seitz of Gibbon; A. C. Bartz of Winthrop; R. Heidman of Arlington; and Professors G. Tagatz of this place and Val Bartz of Dryden; Reverends Geo. Diemer of Brownston; Wm. Prigge of Winthrop; C. H. Kowelske of Stewart; C. Haerie of Stewart; A. Hoyer of Arlington; H. W. Krull of Hector; R. H. Schmitt of Buffalo Lake, and E. Schipman of Gaylord.

The conference also set up some ground rules for discussing the doctrines in question. They hoped to make a fresh start without dredging up statements made in the previous controversy.

Next it should be noted that all participants agreed among themselves in advance to avoid the historical record completely. We did not want to attempt to justify what has been printed and written over the last thirty-five years, both publicly and privately, by the opposing sides concerning the controverted articles of doctrine; for on the one hand we did not have the time, and on the other hand, experience had taught [us] that on this path our goal could only with difficulty be reached, [and] that on this rock, in fact, all previous attempts at unity were shattered. Therefore, we did not ask: what did Stellanor write, and what did Walther reply, and which of the two got it right? We have finally made ourselves free from the thought, as though only theological faculties were called to set forth the true Lutheran teaching, and therewith alone would doctrinal controversies be capable of resolution.⁶⁴³

At the second meeting at Gaylord the assembled pastors adopted the following three theses. These statements excluded any thought of human merit or cooperation in conversion and any attempt to resolve the problem for human logic in teaching that a person's salvation is fully dependent on God and that a person can blame only himself if he is lost. They also rejected the teaching that faith is a condition or pre-condition of salvation, in reality ruling out election *intuitu fidei*.

1. The conversion of a human being is solely a work of God the Holy Spirit.
2. The origin of the salvation of a human being is solely God's grace and Christ's merit. The origin of damnation is solely the human being's guilt and sins. We must permit both of these teachings, clearly maintained in Scripture, to stand alongside each other, without making [any] attempt to make them tally according to human reason and logic.
3. Faith is the means of salvation given by God. It leads into error to say that faith is a condition of salvation. If faith were a condition, which people had to fulfill, thus it would follow from that, that the human being had the power to fulfill the condition, [and] thus [had the power] to believe based on his own decision. Against this, we confess in the third article [of the Creed in the *Small Catechism*]: I believe, that I do not believe in Jesus Christ by my own reason or power, etc. If one says that faith is the God-given means to salvation, then the "only by grace" remains unassailed.⁶⁴⁴

The August 25 meeting in Winthrop and the September 15 meeting in Arlington resulted in the "Sibley County Theses." Although they used the Norwegian *Opgjør* as a basis for

⁶⁴³ *Minnesota District Proceedings*, 1920. 26-27.

⁶⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 29-30.

discussion, the group eliminated from the *Opgjør* statements which would have been objectionable to members of the Synodical Conference. For instance, the *Opgjør* speaks in terms of not wanting “to weaken a human being’s feeling of responsibility in regard to the acceptance or rejection of grace.” The Sibley County Theses substitute the expression not wanting “to diminish the guilt of a human being in rejecting grace.” The Sibley County Theses also differ from the *Opgjør* in refraining from speaking about two forms of teaching the doctrine of election.

The new theses, however, follow the *Opgjør* in stating that since both sides accepted Article 11 of the *Formula of Concord*, “they see it as unnecessary to church unity to set up new and more extensive doctrinal statements about this article of faith.” The new theses also eliminated thesis #3 adopted at the Gaylord meeting. Pastor Schlemmer offers this explanation:

Point 3 was deleted. There was a long dispute about the phraseology according to which God has elected in view of faith. It was expressed like this: This formula has been taken up by the Church in the struggle with Calvinism. With this expression it ought to be said that the stubbornly believing are the elect, and a rationalizing explanation ought not be given [as to] why some are saved instead of others.⁶⁴⁵

In the long run it may have been beneficial if thesis #3 had been retained. Nevertheless the Sibley County Theses reject the Calvinistic teachings of absolute predestination and irresistible grace and the corresponding synergistic errors which give human beings a role in conversion and election.

At the Arlington meeting the group unanimously approved the theses. Twelve signed the document, including four Minnesota Synod pastors, five Missouri Synod pastors, and four Ohio Synod pastors. One Ohio Synod pastor, although he did not vote against the theses, refused to sign his name. Within a few days four more Minnesota Synod pastors and one Missouri Synod pastor subscribed. The group also decided to print 1,000 copies in the hope that others might subscribe. They resolved to meet at a later date for a larger conference in St. Paul or Minneapolis.

⁶⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 30-31.

Those attending the meeting felt such unity that they joined in an expression of faith, believing that they had indeed brought about a God-pleasing resolution to the controversy that had torn apart Midwestern Lutheranism. Schlemmer describes the experience.

After this discussion and improvement of the *Opgjoer*, the Ohioans present explained that they no longer took us for Calvinists, and we for our part responded that we ought not take them for synergists any longer. We felt that we were so united in faith, that we concluded the session with the hymn “Now Thank We All Our God” and a shared Lord’s Prayer. In later gatherings this was indeed not done; but not because we feared that we had been guilty of syncretism, but for the sake of such people who did not sufficiently understand the facts of the situation, lest some sort of offense be given. The net result of our meetings in Sibley County is gathered together in the preceding “Sibley County Theses.”⁶⁴⁶

Although there may have been unity among the pastors at the Sibley County meetings, events a decade or so later would demonstrate that unity had not been reached in the synods at large.

The published theses aroused a lot of interest in the various Midwestern synods. The result was a series of meetings in St. Paul, Minnesota.⁶⁴⁷ The first intersynodical conference took place on November 9-10, 1915, in the Minnesota Synod’s Trinity congregation. Each of the synods represented at the meeting chose its own secretary. Pastor Hy. Boettcher of Gibbon, Minnesota, served as chairman. Pastor Seltz represented the Sibley County Conference and gave the background of the movement and the development of the Sibley County Theses. More than 100 pastors were in attendance, meeting in five sessions over two days. The final session was dedicated to a discussion of the theses. The discussions seemed positive even though only half of the theses were considered. The participants felt that further meetings would be beneficial.

Only pastors were invited to the St. Paul meeting. The seminary professors in attendance were allowed to ask questions but were not allowed the right to debate. Some have suggested that these ground rules, namely ignoring past history and not allowing professors to speak, were a

⁶⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁶⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 23-24.

fatal flaw in the hope for resolution of the controversy.⁶⁴⁸ John Wohlrabe suggests that the movement began in opposition to the theologians based on antagonism that had undoubtedly been building since the free conferences held 1903-1906.⁶⁴⁹ J. P. Koehler, a seminary professor and Wisconsin Synod representative on the later Intersynodical Committee, is not quite so negative. He writes,

It really goes without saying that Boettcher and his associates did not intend to slight and disrespect the advice of the professors; they thought that the project stood a better chance of moving along if the pastors felt free and could talk freely among themselves, without professors monopolizing the floor; not mentioning at all, that the project could have divine blessing without the presence of professors. Besides, the professors had less freedom of movement for the conferences.⁶⁵⁰

The next meeting took place January 5-6, 1916. All five sessions were devoted to an examination of the Sibley County Theses. The participants made a few minor changes in the phrasing of the theses and the sequence. A remarkable unanimity was once again in evidence. The theses were subscribed at the end of the sessions by 17 Ohio Synod pastors, 31 Missouri Synod pastors, 7 from the Iowa Synod, and 19 from the Minnesota Synod. One Ohio Synod pastor voted against two statements in the theses. It seemed wise to the participants to send the theses to pastors of the various synods so that they could discuss them at their pastoral conferences meeting during the Easter season. They also expressed the desire that another intersynodical conference might convene after the pastoral conferences had had the opportunity to meet.

The third intersynodical conference met at Trinity in St. Paul on May 3-4, 1916. The participants considered suggestions that had been forwarded from the pastoral conferences. The conference adopted the preface with an appendix and two omissions. The approved theses became known as the St. Paul Theses. The conference appointed a central committee of four pastors from the St. Paul area: Pastor Karl Ermisch of the Iowa Synod, Pastor A.C. Haase of the

⁶⁴⁸ Meitner, *Strangers to Sisters*, 94-95.

⁶⁴⁹ John Wohlrabe, "Zur Enigung: The St. Paul Theses—A Document Study," *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly*, 56, (Fall 1983), 139.

⁶⁵⁰ Koehler, *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 253.

Minnesota Synod, Pastor A.H. Kuntz of the Missouri Synod, and Pastor Emil Lehne of the Ohio Synod. The conference authorized the central committee to have the St. Paul Theses printed and distributed free of charge to anyone who requested them. A free will offering gathered at the conference covered all costs.

By June 7, 1916, the theses were subscribed by a remarkable number of pastors, 555 in all. From the Iowa Synod 179 subscribed, 17 from the Michigan Synod, 80 from Minnesota, 165 from Missouri, 3 from the Nebraska Synod, 70 from Ohio, and 50 from Wisconsin.

Two more meetings took place in St. Paul before the various synods became officially involved. On January 10-11, 1917, the conference met at Trinity Church to discuss an essay prepared by Iowa Synod pastor, Karl Ermisch. The essay was entitled, "The Doctrine of Conversion according to the Lutheran Confessions." After discussing the essay, those present adopted it with a few changes. The central committee together with conference chairman, Pastor Hy. Boettcher, called for another conference to be held May 9-10. At this meeting Pastor Seltz presented an essay entitled, "The Concept of Election in the Doctrine of Election of Grace according to Scripture and the Confessions." After Pastor Seltz read his essay twice, the conference unanimously adopted it with very little discussion and no changes. Because of the unanimity the group decided that there was no reason to meet on May 10.

Those gathered in St. Paul believed that the time had now come to turn the matter over to the various synods for official discussion and action. The three members of the Synodical Conference drafted the following memorial and sent it to each synod with the appropriate name changes.

To the honorable Minnesota Synod, in the presence of President J. R. Baumann:

We pastors from the Minnesota, Iowa, Ohio, and Missouri Synods, who assembled here in St. Paul, Minn. at an intersynodical conference, herewith submit for review to an honorable Synod the results of our discussions in several conferences about the doctrines treated in the accompanying documents, and likewise suggest that the honorable Synod appoint a committee, which could examine these documents in conjunction with similar committees of [the] other Synods; or that the

honorable Synod would take other steps which appear to the Synod to serve the same end, in order to attain a conclusive unity of doctrine among the participating Synods.

In the name and with the mandate of the intersynodical conference assembled here on 9 May [1917], signed with all respect of the committee through its secretary.

H. Kuntz, Hy. Boettcher and A. C. Haase, Members of the Committee.
St. Paul, Minn., 10 May 1917.⁶⁵¹

The hope for the resolution of the Election Controversy and for Lutheran union could also be seen among officials of the Ohio Synod. District President C.C. Hein in an address to the Western District of the Ohio Synod stated that he did not believe that any Missouri Synod pastors from the pulpit or in the classroom teach irresistible grace to their laymen even though Ohio accused Missouri of this Calvinistic error. He also said that he did not believe that a single Ohio Synod preaches or a single Ohio Synod layman believes that man by his own inherent natural power must do something for his conversion even though Missouri accused Ohio of that false doctrine. “The ordinary Christian, and not only he but many pastors in the two antagonistic synods, are convinced that exactly the same doctrine is preached in the pulpits of the Missouri and Ohio synods, and I believe they are right!”⁶⁵²

The prospects for success seemed bright if a leader in the Ohio Synod could make such a claim. Careful readers of his address, however, would have taken note that Hein praised the Norwegian merger of 1917 and called it a union based on truth.⁶⁵³ Synodical Conference leaders and theologians believed that the Norwegian merger was based on a compromise agreement.

The Chicago (Intersynodical) Theses

The various synods acted on the invitation of the Intersynodical Committee rather quickly. The Minnesota Synod reacted favorably and elected representatives—four pastors, two

⁶⁵¹ *Minnesota District Proceedings*, 1920. 24-25.

⁶⁵² C.C. Hein, “The Lutheran Church of the United States in the Jubilee Year 1917.” (Columbus: Lutheran Book Concern 1917), 9. See also 7-8.

⁶⁵³ *Ibid.*, 9.

teachers, and two laymen— to serve on the new committee to deal with representatives of the other synods.⁶⁵⁴ One wonders why this was done. This was the last convention of the Minnesota Synod. With the amalgamation of the Minnesota Synod with the Wisconsin Synod, Michigan Synod, and Nebraska Synod into the Ev. Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan, and Other States, the Minnesota Synod no longer had independent existence but had become a district of the merged synod.

The first convention of the new⁶⁵⁵ Ev. Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan, and Other States was held at Trinity Lutheran Church in St. Paul, Minnesota, August 1917. The merged synod appointed a committee of five which now also included two seminary professors.⁶⁵⁶

The other synods followed suit. Missouri appointed three representatives including two pastors and one seminary professor.⁶⁵⁷ The Iowa Synod appointed four including a seminary professor.⁶⁵⁸ The Ohio Synod appointed five including a seminary professor.⁶⁵⁹

This new Intersynodical Committee with official representatives from each of the participating synods began a series of rather successful meetings. From February 1918 through

⁶⁵⁴ The elected representatives were Pastor Hy. Boettcher of Gibbon, Minn., Wm. Sauer of Watertown, South Dakota, Im. F. Albrecht of Fairfax, Minn., and J. W. F. Pieper of Stillwater, Minn.; teachers Kannenberg of St. Paul and Blauert of New Ulm, Minn., as well as laymen I. Schacht of Red Wing and F. Christgau of Austin, Minn.

⁶⁵⁵ Unfortunately, the 1892 federation of these synods had also been called by the same name. To prevent confusion Wisconsin Synod authors today will refer to the former as the federation and the latter as the merged synod.

⁶⁵⁶ The members of the Wisconsin Synod delegation were Professors John Schaller and Herman Meyer of Wauwatosa, Wis., and Pastors A. C. Haase of St. Paul, secretary of the merged synod, Max Lehninger of Plymouth, Nebr., and William Bodamer of Toledo, Ohio. Each of the four synods which had merged to form the new joint synod had a representative on the committee. Both Schaller and Meyer died suddenly in 1920 and were replaced by Professors J.P. Koehler and John P. Meyer, the older brother of Herman Meyer. Max Lehninger was called to serve at the Wisconsin Synod seminary in 1929 and remained on the faculty until 1952.

⁶⁵⁷ Professor George Mezger of St. Louis, MO., and Pastors O. L. Hohenstein of Bloomington, Ill., and J. Kleinhans of Staunton, Ill., President of the South Illinois District.

⁶⁵⁸ Professor George Fritschel of Dubuque, J. Becker of Waverly, Iowa, and G. Bergstraesser of Sterling, Nebr., and Pastor Karl Ermisch of St. Paul, Minn.

⁶⁵⁹ Pastors C. C. Hein of Columbus, Ohio, President of the Western District (subsequently president of American Lutheran Church formed by a merger of the Ohio, Iowa, and Buffalo synods in 1930), M. P. F. Doermann of Blue Island, Ill., A. Pflueger of Clyde, Ohio, and W. D. Ahl of Oshkosh, Wis., and Professor Wm. Schmidt of St. Paul, MN.

May 1920 the committee met six times in three-day sessions to discuss the important teachings of conversion and election.⁶⁶⁰ Schuetze cites this fact as evidence that the desire for unity was strong since the committee was comprised of busy pastors and professors who were willing to devote their precious time to meet.⁶⁶¹

In 1919 Professor George Mezger of the Missouri Synod presented six theses on conversion which were thoroughly discussed. By May 1920 the committee had unanimously approved ten theses on conversion. The 1920 Missouri Synod convention heard this report concerning the theses:

The committee . . . has examined said theses and found them not only conformable to the Scriptures and the confessions of the Lutheran Church, but also a concise presentation of the Scriptural doctrine of conversion, offering a sufficient basis for agreement in doctrine.⁶⁶²

Since the goal of reaching agreement in the doctrine of election had not yet been achieved the Missouri Synod declared that it was “ready together with our sister synod of Wisconsin to continue the doctrinal discussions with the Iowa and Ohio Synods.”⁶⁶³

In 1923 the report of Missouri’s representatives on the Intersynodical Committee informed the Missouri Synod convention that the Buffalo Synod had also made public its desire to join in the discussions.⁶⁶⁴ It was also reported that from 1920 to 1923 three to four meetings were held annually and that theses and antitheses on the doctrines of conversion and election had been adopted by the Intersynodical Committee. Because some in the synod had also lodged protests against some of the theses, the Missouri Synod appointed a committee to test the theses and to examine all objections lodged until the end of 1925 and report its findings to the next synodical convention in 1926. Other doctrines which had historically separated the Missouri, Iowa, and Buffalo synods were now also being discussed by the Intersynodical Committee. The

⁶⁶⁰ *Missouri Synod Proceedings*, 1920. (German), 239.

⁶⁶¹ Schuetze, *The Synodical Conference*, 197.

⁶⁶² *Missouri Synod Proceedings*, 1920 (English), 83. *Missouri Synod Proceedings 1920* (German), 240.

⁶⁶³ *Missouri Synod Proceedings*, 1920 (English), 84. *Missouri Synod Proceedings*, 1920 (German), 241.

⁶⁶⁴ *Missouri Synod Proceedings*, 1923 (German), 227.

Missouri Synod expressed joy over these developments and resolved to continue the discussions.⁶⁶⁵

Ironically it was also reported that the Norwegian Synod of the American Ev. Lutheran Church, which had broken with the merged Norwegian Church because the merger had been based on doctrinal compromise, was now requesting permission to send its theological candidates to Missouri's seminary in St. Louis. The Norwegians would supply a professor of their own for the St. Louis institution.⁶⁶⁶ The Norwegian Synod would soon be raising questions about the Intersynodical Movement and the Chicago (Intersynodical) Theses.

Missouri's representatives on the Intersynodical Committee (John Kleinhans, William Arndt, and Theodore Graebner) reported to the synod's 1926 convention that the Intersynodical Committee had reached agreement not only on conversion and election, but also on a number of other doctrines that had been in dispute.⁶⁶⁷ The report also said

5. We believe that the sentences now before Synod cover all doctrinal questions which have been under controversy among the participating synods. Whether the theses are adequate in all points, Synod will have to decide on the basis of the report made by the committee elected to examine the theses.

6. The question now arises whether adoption of these theses on the part of the participating synods can be followed without more ado by a declaration of unity in doctrine and by fraternal recognition. Such, indeed ought to be the case. In the present instance, however, we fear further obstacles must be removed, since, for example, touching the article of church-fellowship a different conception evidently obtains in the synods concerned. At all events a different practice is followed. Still we ought to endeavor, by continued discussion, to attain unity also in those points where differences still exist.⁶⁶⁸

The issue raised about possible differences in the understanding of the doctrine of church fellowship was the result of the efforts of the Ohio, Iowa, and Buffalo synods to establish

⁶⁶⁵ *Missouri Synod Proceedings*, 1923 (English), 83.

⁶⁶⁶ *Missouri Synod Proceedings*, 1923 (English), 83-84.

⁶⁶⁷ The doctrines included in the Chicago (Intersynodical) Theses are the Scriptures; Our Attitude to the Lutheran Symbols; Church-Fellowship; The Church; The Spiritual Priesthood; The Office of the Ministry; The Antichrist; Chiliasm; Sunday; and Open Questions.

⁶⁶⁸ *Missouri Synod Proceedings*, 1926 (English), 136.

relations with the Norwegian Lutheran Church in America. This synod was the result of a merger based on the controversial Madison Settlement.

The committee appointed to examine the Chicago (Intersynodical) Theses (Theodore Engelder, Richard Neitzel, and Paul Schultz) suggested a number of changes or additions to the theses for the sake of clarification and to avoid possible misunderstanding. The committee made these suggestions for the thesis on election:

The “statement concerning the phrase *intuitu fidei finalis*” ought to read as follows: “Besides speaking of eternal election in the form presented in the foregoing theses (which has been called the first form), the following form (called the second form) has also been used in the Lutheran Church: ‘Out of pure grace God decreed from eternity that He would on Judgment Day, bestow on those of whom He, as omniscient God, foresaw that in time they would believe on Christ and persevere in faith unto the end, in view of this their faith (or as it has been put: in view of Christ’s merit apprehended by faith), the crown of glory.’ Thus according to the first form election would be the cause of faith, and according to the second form faith would be the presupposition of election and the deciding factor.

“Concerning this matter we take the following position”:--

Point 1. Change “since” to “if.” At the close of the paragraph place a dash and add: “Since it must be our endeavor, according to the word of God, to ‘speak the same thing,’ everyone should accustom himself to speak of election in the terms of Scripture and the Confessions, all the more so, since the Scripture doctrine of election can in no wise be presented according to the second form.” (Paragraphs 1 and 2 are thus integrated.)

Add: “2. Whereas, according to the Scriptures, our election in Christ Jesus is a cause which effects our salvation, our faith, and our perseverance (p. 9, par. 4), faith, as the presupposition of election or the deciding factor in election is thereby rejected. Employing the second form in such a manner involves an error which subverts the foundation of faith.”⁶⁶⁹

The Examining Committee was concerned that the controversy be settled with clear statements that no one could use to hide the differences which had historically separated the synods.

On the basis of the report of the Intersynodical Committee and the report of the Examining Committee, the floor committee at the convention made these recommendations which were then adopted by the Missouri Synod in convention.

⁶⁶⁹ *Missouri Synod Proceedings*, 1926 (English), 137-139.

2. It must, however, be stated that the Lutheran doctrine has not yet in all points received such expression as is clear, precise, adequate, and exclusive of all error. The changes which the Examining Committee, elected by the previous convention, has proposed, especially in the theses on conversion and predestination, are well founded. For this reason the theses cannot as yet be recommended to Synod for adopted (*sic*) in their present form.

5. We furthermore recommend that the same Intersynodical Committee be retained and that it continue discussions with similar committees of other synods, in much the same way as has been done hitherto, for the purpose of effecting a more exact formulation of the theses in those points to which exception has been taken, or of framing other, shorter and simpler, theses, and removing other obstacles to which our Intersynodical Committee draws attention. To one of these obstacles our Intersynodical Committee refers in its report to Synod with the words: "Touching the article of Christian fellowship, a different conception evidently obtains in the synods concerned."⁶⁷⁰

Many in the Missouri Synod were not yet convinced that full agreement had been attained. The doctrine of church fellowship was recognized as an issue that had to be addressed. Historically those Lutherans in fellowship with the Missouri Synod had said that agreement in doctrine and practice was necessary for the expression of fellowship between two church bodies. Those who disagreed with this understanding were likely to tolerate doctrinal compromise or ambiguous doctrinal statements. The practice of the Ohio and Iowa synods was also different from the practice of Missouri and the other synods in the Synodical Conference. The former were members of the National Lutheran Council which the Synodical Conference considered a unionistic organization. The relationship of Iowa and Ohio to the National Lutheran Conference, as well as their involvement in a number of other conferences raised red flags. Professor Theodore Graebner was concerned enough that he wrote the following to Professor Theodore Engelder in 1925:

By their practice they prove beyond the shadow of a doubt that their conception of church fellowship is different from our own . . . Undoubtedly, both are engaged in Unionistic undertakings. And when they draw out of these it will be because interest is exhausted, not because the thing is wrong. The Synod (*sic*) are drifting into a middle-of- the road policy which would spell ruin to our Synod and ultimately must destroy Lutheranism. . . [I] will bring this out so clearly that none can misunderstand, not our laymen either.⁶⁷¹

⁶⁷⁰ *Missouri Synod Proceedings*, 1926 (English) 140-141.

⁶⁷¹ Letter of Theodore Graebner to Theodore Engelder, November 27, 1925, in the William Arndt File, Concordia Historical Institute Archives. Quoted in Nelson, *The Lutherans in North America*, 446.

The Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church (name later change to the Evangelical Lutheran Synod or ELS) was founded in 1918 by thirteen pastors and congregations that refused to go along with the Norwegian merger. This synod became a member of the Synodical Conference in 1920, but did not participate in the Intersynodical Movement. These pastors' experience with union negotiations had convinced them that great care had to be taken lest there be doctrinal compromise.

The little Norwegian Synod was highly critical of the National Lutheran Council which brought together liberal eastern Lutherans and their former brothers in the merged Norwegian Synod. Only a year after the Norwegian merger the National Lutheran Council was founded with Hans Stub as its president and Lauritz Larsen as its secretary. Both of these men belonged to the merged Norwegian Lutheran Church. Professor S. C. Ylvisaker in an essay delivered at the 1920 convention of the little Norwegian Synod wrote,

The Council may fitly be characterized as a blunder and a calamity. . . A calamity, for through the organization and work of the National Lutheran Council the floodgates of unionism and lodgery have been opened still wider and further sections of the Lutheran Church are being subjected to their destroying power. It also seeks to reconstruct, to build up, in one part, but destroys it in another; it seeks to unite, but has caused further strife and dissension; it seeks to save Lutheranism in America and Europe, but is robbing it of its real strength and making it easy prey to the spirit of the Reformed Churches. The National Lutheran Council has brought a crisis in the history of the Lutheran Church in America. May God in his grace keep us firm.⁶⁷²

Since Iowa and Ohio were members of the National Lutheran Council, the little Norwegian Synod was concerned about her brothers in the Synodical Conference being involved with the Intersynodical Movement and doctrinal negotiations with Iowa and Ohio.

When it became evident that Ohio and Iowa were moving toward fellowship with the merged Norwegian Lutheran Church, the little Norwegian Synod became even more concerned. The Minneapolis Theses of 1925 raised an alarm. A letter from Pastor J.E. Thoen to Pastor G.A.

⁶⁷² S. C. Ylvisaker, "The National Lutheran Council," presented to the 3rd Regular convention of the Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church, Minneapolis, MN, June 4-10, 1920. 80. English translation in Meitner, *Strangers to Sisters*, 99.

Gullixson expressed concern over the optimism of many in Missouri toward the Intersynodical Theses and the Intersynodical Conferences.

I hope you can come to the meeting in St. Paul the 9th and 10th. We must do all we can to prevent any kind of compromise. I cannot feel full confidence in our Missouri brethren who are so enthusiastic for these colloquiums. They do not realize the dangers I am afraid.⁶⁷³

The Norwegian Synod's General Pastoral Conference in 1925 also sent to the Intersynodical Committee these criticisms concerning the phrase *intuitu fidei finalis* in the current version of the theses:

1. Concerning the term "election in a wider" and "a narrower sense" it is our opinion that they should not be used in the manner which they have been employed in the theses, because it gives the impression that there are two doctrines of election in Scripture.
2. The Committee's position as stated concerning the second form does not agree with the sense of the words of the second form as quoted. In the second form as it has actually been used, man is represented as acting, while in the statement of the committee giving the meaning or what is meant by the second form God is represented as acting.
3. The two forms, as they have been used during the controversy, do not teach the same doctrine of election. The first form makes election "the cause of faith," while the second form "presupposes faith and makes it the deciding factor in election." If the last clause means anything at all, it makes man's faith the cause of election. (*intuitu fidei—ablative of cause*)⁶⁷⁴

When the Wisconsin Synod met in 1927, one of the committee members, Professor John P. Meyer who served at the Wisconsin Synod's Wauwatosa seminary, reported that several meetings had been held in the previous two years, but the task was not yet finished.⁶⁷⁵

That work was completed in 1928 and the official German version of the Intersynodical (Chicago) Theses was published in the Wisconsin Synod's *Theologische Quartalschrift*.⁶⁷⁶ An

⁶⁷³ Letter of J.E. Thoen to G.A. Gullixson, February 6, 1926, ELS Presidential Files: 1920s. Evangelical Lutheran Synod Archives, Mankato, MN. Quoted in Paul Meitner, "Strangers to Sisters," 98.

⁶⁷⁴ General Pastoral Conference of the Norwegian Synod, "To the Committee appointed to receive criticism on the theses adopted by the so-called Intersynodical Committee," dated August 25, 1925. This document is found in the William Arndt file (box 16a, folder 10). Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis, Missouri. Quoted in Charles F. Bunzel, *The Missouri Synod and the Chicago (Intersynodical) Theses*, 32.

⁶⁷⁵ *Wisconsin Synod Proceedings*, 1927. 68.

⁶⁷⁶ *Theologische Quartalschrift*, 25, (October 1928), 266-288.

English translation was published in the same journal in 1929.⁶⁷⁷ Professor Meyer presented the theses to the Wisconsin Synod with these words:

Concluding Report of the Intersynodical Committee. – In the present volume we bring to print the Chicago Theses in the text accepted by the Intersynodical Committee on August 2, 1928. – It was not the task of the committee to find an expression for presenting the teachings disputed between the synods, which would be acceptable to all, and under which one could retain his hitherto existing meaning unchanged. That would have meant coarse unionism. The sense of the task, to which each member of this Committee of the represented synods heartily agreed, was rather: to once again thoroughly and carefully test the present differences between us in the light of Scripture and the confessions, and then bring to expression the manifest truth in Scriptures in a clear, unable to be misunderstood witness. In wholesome horror of all unionism the committee has constantly endeavored to avoid such an expression which could appear to have perhaps two interpretations, so that the resulting theses would be always understood by all in the same sense, and in their clear wording rests the heartfelt confession of every one of the Committee members. The blessing of the Lord continued unhindered in the efforts of the Committee. The living Word of our God demonstrated his uniting power. The Holy Spirit, who gathers the whole Christendom on earth, carried on his work of unity with strength in the Committee members' hearts, so that they found themselves united in the true faith and now lay before the church a unanimous confession with the accepted theses.

Now the theses go to the individual synods for testing and their opinions. It will be the task of every member of those synods, especially the pastors, to become familiar with the theses according to content and text, and to decide for himself whether they are the expression of his heartfelt belief or not. To this end we bring them to print in this periodical, and our publishing house will prepare a special edition.⁶⁷⁸

Unfortunately two Ohio Synod members of the committee felt conscience bound to add a disclaimer to the final report. Although the theses were the unanimous confession of the committee, the following statement had to raise red flags for those who had not been a part of the committee's discussions because the disclaimer involved the disputed expression, election *intuitu fidei*.

The Theses treat the doctrine of election, or of the predestination unto adoption of children *a posteriori*, that is, from the viewpoint of believing Christians, and answer the question: "Whence is my present, past, and future salvation?" We concede the right to take this view, and also give it the preference for practical ends. However, we cannot share the opinion that Scripture and the Confessions present the doctrine of election

⁶⁷⁷ *Theologische Quartalschrift*, (October 1929), 250-273. Although this English translation was authorized, the German was considered the official version.

⁶⁷⁸ *Theologische Quartalschrift*, 26, (October 1928), 289. English translation in David Kipfmiller, "The Chicago (Intersynodical) Theses." Senior church history paper, 1979. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library, 17.

chiefly from this viewpoint, and that, accordingly, *only* this form of the doctrine is to be authorized in the Church.

Furthermore, we cannot say that the so-called second form of the doctrine which has been used by our Church for more than three hundred years, gives expression to another “doctrine”; we regard it rather as another “method of teaching”, by which the right doctrine of election can be maintained to its full extent.

As regards the doctrinal contents of the Theses, we are in complete harmony therewith.

We offer this declaration, partly because we wish to act in perfect sincerity, partly because we cannot admit that our Lutheran Church for the entire period of three hundred years did not possess the right doctrine of election or of the predestination unto adoption of children.

W. D. Ahl

*M. P. F. Doermann*⁶⁷⁹

While opposition to the theses was not in evidence in the Wisconsin Synod, there were a number of voices raised against the theses in the Missouri Synod. Pastor J. Buenger published a booklet entitled, *Missouri, Iowa, and Ohio: The Old and New Differences*, in 1928 or early 1929.⁶⁸⁰ Buenger reviews the historic differences between the synods and looks at more recent doctrinal statements on church and ministry, open questions, millennium and Antichrist, the Sunday question, conversion and election, and the inerrancy of the Scriptures. Buenger made the purpose of the booklet clear in the introduction.

It is the purpose of the following articles to offer all that are interested, ministers as well as teachers and lay members, information about the doctrinal differences between the afore-mentioned groups of synods so as to enable the reader to form his own judgment. To this end each chapter first presents the crude form of the error in which a false doctrine is easily recognized by any Christian, then, step by step, the more refined and seemingly harmless forms are shown in which the same error tries to hide itself. In this way, by never losing the thread of thought, Christians will be able to perceive even the most subtle and skillful disguise of false doctrine.⁶⁸¹

Buenger does not examine the Chicago (Intersynodical) Theses but reviews the historic differences between the synods and the more recent statements of Ohio and Iowa. He finds the

⁶⁷⁹ *Theologische Quartalschrift*, 26, (October 1929), 272-273.

⁶⁸⁰ The booklet was published under his name alone with no date of publication. The most likely date seems to be 1928 because of the dates of some of the sources he quotes. It most certainly was published before the Missouri Synod's 1929 convention and undoubtedly was intended to influence the synod's vote on the Intersynodical (Chicago) Theses.

⁶⁸¹ J. Buenger, *Missouri, Iowa, and Ohio: The Old and New Differences*, 6.

recent statements of spokesmen for these two synods to be more subtle than the older statements but still in error or lacking proper clarity. He suggests that there is one question on which Missouri and Iowa have never agreed—the amount of agreement necessary for fellowship. Iowa in one way or another has always stated that the remaining differences between the two synods “do not belong to the sphere of doctrines or articles of faith.”⁶⁸² Although Iowa did not see these differences as preventing fellowship, Missouri and Wisconsin saw these differences as differences in doctrine which must be overcome for fellowship to be established. Buenger concludes his booklet with this warning:

It is true that the present time, in some respects, is more favorable for a settlement than any time before. The heat of the controversy is passed, the minds of the combatants have calmed down, there is more common ground than ever because the contending parties have come nearer to each other, and it is now possible to overlook the whole territory.

But at the same time there is one grave danger threatening us. Because a great many are tired of doctrinal controversies, and the differences do no longer seem so important, we are apt to content ourselves with the common ground on which we stand overlooking the differences that are still left.

Such a union without true unity in faith and doctrine, however, would be a calamity for the Lutheran Church, the testimony and the sufferings of our Fathers would then have been in vain.

Let all who love our American Zion, by their prayers and their faithful adherence to the truth help to further true unity and prevent a false union.⁶⁸³

Some in important positions in the Missouri Synod also were concerned about the adoption of the Chicago theses. Bunzel notes evidence that Friedrich Pfotenhauer (1859–1939), president of the Missouri Synod was against the adoption of the theses.⁶⁸⁴ Pfotenhauer issued a warning in his presidential address to the synod in 1929. He recounted the confessional stand of the Reformers in the sixteenth century and noted that the Lutheran Church had prized purity of teaching as their greatest treasure. He bemoaned the fact that in large territories of the Lutheran

⁶⁸² *Ibid.*, 91-92.

⁶⁸³ *Ibid.*, 92.

⁶⁸⁴ Bunzel cites a letter from J. T. Mueller to F. Pieper, January 2, 1928, in which Mueller reports, “Dr. Pfotenhauer ist ganz und gar gegen die Theses.” F. Pieper File, Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis, Missouri. Bunzel, *The Missouri Synod and the Chicago (Intersynodical) Theses*. 49.

Church purity of doctrine was no longer prized and a spirit of indifference has allowed one doctrine after another to be thrown overboard with little effort to indoctrinate the youth. He reminded the delegates that the founders of the Missouri Synod recognized the Lutheran Confessions as a golden legacy. He also issued some warnings.

With sadness of heart we must register the indisputable fact that in our own generation the appreciation and love of pure doctrine is waning. We can see this in many places. Our church is in danger of drifting into a state of lethargy . . .

In this attitude of our fathers, my dear brethren, there lies a solemn admonition to the Church of the present day. And how we need that admonition! The universal tendency of our times is to “get together.” Isolation in church-life is regarded as intolerable. Those who keep themselves separate for the sake of the truth are denounced as bigots. The well-being and prosperity of the Church is sought in the merger of church bodies even at the cost of truth. Sad to say, this destructive virus of unionism has infected also many Lutheran circles. This modern striving after external union despite spiritual disunion brings to one’s mind the words which God spoke to Israel by the prophet Isaiah: “Say ye not, A Confederacy, to all them to whom the people shall say, A confederacy; neither fear ye their fear nor be afraid. Sanctify the Lord of Hosts Himself, and let Him be your fear, and let Him be your dread.”

God grant the remembrance of the great events in this history of our Church may be to all of us a call of admonition and encouragement not to seek the well-being of the Church in all manner of unions at the expense of truth.⁶⁸⁵

Floor Committee 19 at the 1929 Missouri Synod Convention considered a report from the Missouri Synod members of the Intersynodical Committee, a report from the Examining Committee of the Chicago (Intersynodical) Theses, as well as a memorial sent to the convention by the Northeast Special Conference of Iowa. This conference of Missouri Synod pastors protested the Intersynodical Theses as “inadequate in many details and therefore unserviceable for purposes of union” and requested the synod “to reject the theses and to desist from further conferences.”⁶⁸⁶

The members of the Intersynodical Committee explained that they had met several times with representatives from the other synods and that many of the recommendations made by the Examining Committee in 1926 had been adopted. The fact that some suggestions were not

⁶⁸⁵ *Missouri Synod Proceedings*, 1929 (English), 7-8.

⁶⁸⁶ *Missouri Synod Proceedings*, 1929 (English), 112.

adopted “was not due to any differences in doctrine between the colloquents, but to the fact that most of the colloquents considered the proposals liable to misunderstandings or superfluous.”

The Intersynodical Committee Report concluded with the following paragraph.

The theses are before Synod for adoption or rejection. We consider the question whether the theses can be adopted to be distinct from the question whether we can enter fraternal relations with the synods with which we have been conferring. The latter is at present excluded by the connections into which, sad to say, these synods have entered and the fraternal relations which they maintain with Lutherans who are not faithful to the confessions. The theses are a matter by themselves, and Synod ought to take action on them.⁶⁸⁷

The Ohio, Iowa, and Buffalo synods had entered into fraternal relations with the large Norwegian Church without any disavowal of the Madison Settlement with its compromise agreement on the doctrine of election. It was a contradiction for the representatives of Ohio, Iowa, and Buffalo to unanimously agree to the Chicago (Intersynodical) Theses while their synods were entering into fellowship with the Norwegians who tolerated two contradictory teachings on election.

Missouri’s representatives had joined the other synods’ representatives on the Intersynodical Committee in unanimously adopting the theses. They believed that the theses were doctrinally sound and could be acknowledged as such without consideration of fraternal relations with Ohio, Iowa, and Buffalo.

The Examining Committee’s judgment on the theses was quite different. Theological leaders in the Missouri Synod, including seminary professors,⁶⁸⁸ were divided over the adequacy of the theses. Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, professors had been on the Intersynodical Committee. Concordia Seminary, Springfield, Illinois, professors had been on the Examining Committee. The Examining Committee advised the synod to reject the theses “as a possible basis for union with the synods of Ohio, Iowa, and Buffalo, since all chapters and a number of

⁶⁸⁷ *Missouri Synod Proceedings*, 1929 (English), 110.

⁶⁸⁸ Professor Theodore Engelder had been a member of the Examining Committee that in 1926 had proposed a number of changes to the theses. It was reported to the 1929 convention that he had been appointed to the Intersynodical Committee to fill a vacancy. Evidently he had no objection to the adoption of the theses.

paragraphs are inadequate.” The committee noted that “at times they (the theses) do not touch upon the point of controversy; at times they are so phrased that both parties can find in them their own opinion; at times they incline more to the position of our opponents than to our own.”⁶⁸⁹ It is noteworthy that the Examining Committee called the other synods “our opponents,” a term that had not been used in these discussions and which harkened back to the bitterness of the historic controversy. In their opinion there could be no thought of union or using the theses as a basis for church fellowship because the theses did not resolve the original doctrinal differences.

The Examining Committee claimed that the revision of the theses since 1926 had not improved them and noted that the great majority of their suggestions for improvement had been ignored. They claimed that “the chapter which suffered the greatest change by insertion of the declaration on *intuitu fidei finalis* is now less clear than before.” The synod’s representatives on the Intersynodical Committee had expressly mentioned this insertion as an improvement. The Examining Committee also complained that “the Scriptural doctrine of the universal will of grace is not clearly separated from the doctrine of election by grace.” They stated that the distinction between natural and malicious resistance was not ruled out. They claimed that most of the paragraphs in Section D – “Theses on Other Doctrines” were inadequate. The Examining Committee concluded,

Your Committee considers it a hopeless undertaking to make these theses unobjectionable from the point of pure doctrine. It would be better to discard them as a failure. It now seems to your Committee a matter of wisdom to desist from intersynodical conferences. By entering into a closer relationship with the adherents of the Norwegian *Opgjoer*, the opponents have given evidence that they do not hold our position in the doctrines of conversion and election. In view of this action further conferences would be useless and only create the impression as if we were endeavoring to come to an understanding, which is not the case.

It ought now be apparent that the manner of conducting these conferences, to wit, the exclusion of all historical matters, is wrong. As a result the opponents hardly understand each other.⁶⁹⁰

⁶⁸⁹ *Missouri Synod Proceedings*, 1929 (English), 110.

⁶⁹⁰ *Missouri Synod Proceedings*, 1929, (English), 112. The summary of the report of the Examining Committee is printed on pages 110-112.

Floor Committee 19 had conflicting reports to consider. The report of this floor committee acknowledged with thanks that some progress had been made through the diligent efforts of the synod's representatives on Intersynodical Committee and declared that they were not impugning motives or questioning the personal faith or doctrine of any individual. Nevertheless they sided with the report of the Examining Committee. They recommended that the Missouri Synod not adopt the theses because of the serious objections that had been raised and because the Intersynodical Committee had not taken into consideration all the historical data. The failure to consider past history "was evidently not conducive to a full understanding on the part of the colloquents. We must begin with the *status controversiae*." The committee recommended that the synod be ready to deal with Ohio and Iowa only when the latest historical development between these two synods "on the one hand, and the party of the Norwegian *Opgjoer*, on the other hand, be taken up first and adjusted according to the Word of God." The committee recommended that another committee elected by the synod produce as quickly as possible a confessional statement in thesis form starting with the *status controversiae* presenting "the doctrine of the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions, in the shortest, most simple manner." The committee finally recommended that the periodicals of the synod publish articles on the pertinent doctrines of Scripture together with the old and new differences in doctrine.

It is worth noting that the floor committee did not mention any specific doctrinal errors in the theses or wording that was ambiguous, confused, or open to being understood in various ways by different parties.

The Missouri Synod in convention took the following action on the report:

1. It was emphasized that future discussions be contingent on the following two conditions:—
 - a) That the move toward fellowship between the Ohio and Iowa synods, on the one hand, and the Norwegian Lutheran Church, on the other, be first adjusted according to the Word of God;
 - b) That future deliberations proceed from the exact point of controversy and take into account the pertinent history.
2. The report of the committee was *adopted*.

3. Regarding Point 4 it was especially *resolved* that the President appoint the committee.⁶⁹¹

Convention Resolution three resulted in the publication and adoption of the Missouri Synod's *Brief Statement* in 1932. The action by the convention indicated a rejection of the Chicago (Intersynodical) Theses because of a flawed procedure which resulted in a document that could be understood in more than one way and because of the moves toward fellowship with the Norwegian Lutheran Church by Iowa and Ohio.

The Wisconsin Synod, meeting later in the summer of 1929, did not act on the theses. Missouri's rejection ended the Intersynodical Movement. The Wisconsin Synod *Proceedings* contain this brief statement.

Pastor M. Lehninger reported on the work of this committee. He stated that the so-called "Chicago Theses" are the result of ten years of work and the unanimous confession of all participants. The committee recommended that Synod declare its willingness to continue this work with other synods and that all conferences be urged to study and examine the "Chicago Theses" in order that the result of ten years' work be made the property of all.

Synod adopted both recommendations of the committee.⁶⁹²

Of the remaining synods only Buffalo, the smallest of the synods involved, officially accepted the theses. This was rather meaningless in the face of Missouri's rejection.⁶⁹³

The Ohio Synod reacted rather sharply to Missouri's actions. President Hein in his presidential address to his synod's convention in 1930 suggested that part of the problem was that Missouri's representatives had refused to pray with the other representatives even after the theses had been unanimously adopted by the Intersynodical Committee. He wondered whether the problem was the theological professors who "all work for their own good," even though he was quick to state that not every professor had such an attitude. "The hostile spirit shown by some of the pastors is another obstacle."⁶⁹⁴ The Ohio Synod in convention in 1930 passed this resolution:

⁶⁹¹ *Missouri Synod Proceedings*, 1929 (English), 112-113.

⁶⁹² *Wisconsin Synod Proceedings*, 1929. 47.

⁶⁹³ Schuetze, *The Synodical Conference*, 205.

⁶⁹⁴ *Ohio Synod Minutes*, 1930. 11

We deplore the refusal of the Missouri Synod to adopt the Intersynodical Theses which members of their own Seminary faculty at St. Louis had helped to formulate and adopt. We stand ready to re-open negotiations looking toward better mutual understanding.⁶⁹⁵

The rejection of the Chicago (Intersynodical) Theses did not end debate about the content of the theses in the Missouri Synod. Two pastors of Missouri's Northeast Special Conference of Iowa, Hanssen and Melcher, accused the synod's representatives on the Intersynodical Committee of false doctrine because they signed their names to the theses. The conference had made overtures to the Missouri Synod conventions in 1926 and 1929 about the inadequacies of the theses. Hanssen had been a member of Floor Committee 19 which had urged rejection of the theses at the 1929 Missouri Synod convention.

After the convention Hanssen complained that Missouri's Intersynodical Committee had publicly assented to false doctrine in signing their names to the theses when chapter D of the theses contained doctrinal error. These charges were brought to the 1932 Missouri synod convention which found the accusations of Hanssen and Melcher to be unjustified. The 1935 Missouri Synod convention also rejected the appeal of these two pastors. When they appealed to the 1936 Synodical Conference convention, the Synodical Conference also found the charges unsustained.⁶⁹⁶

Convinced of the correctness of his position Hanssen in 1936 published a booklet entitled, *The Historical OPEN QUESTIONS Among American Lutherans*. It was dedicated to the pastoral conferences of the Synodical Conference and was intended to be a discussion of what Hanssen considered the main problem in American Lutheranism, a limitation of how much doctrinal agreement was necessary to express fellowship. He examined "Chapter D" of the Chicago (Intersynodical) Theses to demonstrate that Iowa's understanding of "open questions" had not been excluded and consequently Iowa's understandings of the doctrines in "Chapter D" were not clearly ruled out. Hanssen wrote,

⁶⁹⁵ *Ohio Synod Minutes*, 1930. 109.

⁶⁹⁶ The preceding summary of the Hanssen/Melcher case is based on the more complete report in Bunzel, *The Missouri Synod and the Chicago (Intersynodical) Theses*. 66-71.

The Chicago Intersynodical Theses treat the “Open Questions” in Theses D. 3 and D. 27-29, especially in D. 28. However, they do not state definitely a *principle* which underlies the so-called “Open Questions” and by applying which one might know what is and is not an “Open Question.” They also carefully avoid any names, titles and antitheses which might exclude from this term any one of the doctrines in the traditional catalog of “Open Questions.” These Intersynodical Theses are rather worded in such a way that a champion of these errors can well *accept* these theses *without giving up* any of his pet errors. This will become even more apparent as we progress in this discussion.⁶⁹⁷

John Meyer of the Wisconsin Synod seminary in Thiensville, Wisconsin, reviewed Hanssen’s book in the *Theologische Quartalschrift*. While not agreeing with everything Hanssen wrote, Meyer admits the truth of some of his accusations. Meyer writes,

The author has rendered the Lutheran churches in America a valuable service by the publication of this booklet. Its value lies not in this that all judgments are perfectly true to fact and may be accepted without further investigation. Rather, there are several instances in which the present reviewer disagrees with the author. Its value, as the undersigned sees it, is mainly threefold. It points out that a church body is responsible before God and the Christian world for any error it tolerates in its midst. It points out that the only way of correcting an error in doctrine is by honestly and openly disavowing and revoking it. Lastly it shows, and is itself an illustration of the inadequacy of the so-called Chicago Theses. . .

The undersigned was a member of the Intersynodical Committee. It is a fact that less time was devoted to the theses in chapter D than to the doctrines of Election and Conversion; but it is an overstatement to say that they “were not carefully discussed”. And to say that “these clever omissions cannot be and are not accidental, but they must be and are intentional, at least as far as the champions of the ‘Open Questions’ had a hand in their formulation”, thus ascribing deliberate insincerity to our opponents, is, according to the observations of the undersigned at the meetings, contrary to fact. For that reason we also deny the statement on p. 95 “that the ‘official’ colloquents of the Missouri Synod *were tricked* into giving a declaration” etc. On more than one occasion, when after a thorough discussion a thesis seemed ready for adoption, it happened that one of our opponents raised the warning question if all terms were really understood by all colloquents in the same sense. Far from any attempt to “trick” any one into adopting any ambiguous declaration, our opponents were as much concerned as we of the Synodical Conference to have the differences correctly understood and a real agreement reached in a statement of the truth, impressions to the outside world notwithstanding.

Yet Rev. Hanssen is right when on p. 33 he declares: “Ambiguous and hazy as the Intersynodical Theses D, 16-20, are, it is possible to read into their wording either the doctrinal conceptions of the Synodical Conference or the opposing conception of the American Lutheran Church. And just for that reason they were and still are unacceptable to the synods of the Synodical Conference.”

⁶⁹⁷ Theodore Hanssen, *The Historical OPEN QUESTIONS Among American Lutherans*. (Burlington, Iowa: The Lutheran Literary Board, 1936), 17-18.

The undersigned, as stated before, shares the responsibility for the formulation of the Chicago Theses, and it is not a pleasant thing to admit that they are unsatisfactory, or worse. But on re-reading them after eight years since the last meeting have lapsed, I am forced in the interest of the truth to express my agreement with the above verdict of Rev. Hanssen. The subject matter of these theses having been thoroughly discussed in several meetings of the Committee and the Scripture truths having been established in the discussions, the representatives of the Synodical Conference found these very truths expressed in the proposed theses. In the light of satisfactory oral discussions they seemed to be plain statements of the truth and entirely univocal. To an outsider, who did not take part in the discussions, however, the ambiguities that nevertheless crept into the phraseology are naturally more easy to detect.⁶⁹⁸

Theodore Graebner was one of the Missouri Synod's representatives on the Intersynodical Committee. As a member of the committee he had adopted the theses and believed that they were acceptable as a statement of the various scriptural doctrines they confessed. For him the real issue was the doctrine of church fellowship.

In 1935 Graebner published a book of essays, the first of which surveyed the Lutheran scene in America and laid out what separated the various Lutheran groups.⁶⁹⁹

In the essay he documents the doctrinal problems in American Lutheran Church formed by the merger of Iowa, Ohio, and Buffalo synods in 1930. He also noted that there were serious doctrinal issues in the American Lutheran Conference, a federation consisting of the American Lutheran Church, the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America, the Augustana Synod, the Lutheran Free Church, and the United Danish Church. These various Lutheran synods had joined in a federation even though they were not united in doctrine. The desire for union without true unity of doctrine seemed to be the major problem afflicting the various Lutheran groups. Of the Norwegians who had joined together on the basis of the doctrinal compromises of the Madison Settlement, Graebner writes, "Unscriptural views of fellowship were embedded in the very nature of the Norwegian union. You cannot unite on a compromise platform without creating a psychology which prepares the ground for more compromises."⁷⁰⁰

⁶⁹⁸ *Theologische Quartalschrift*. 33, (July 1936), 216, 218-219.

⁶⁹⁹ Theodore Graebner. *The Problem of Lutheran Union and Other Essays*. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1935). The title of the book is also the title of the first essay.

⁷⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 73

The conclusion that Graebner draws is that most Lutherans in America differed from the synods of the Synodical Conference in their willingness to compromise doctrine and in not recognizing the necessity of doctrinal unity before fellowship can be practiced. He believed that they had a different definition of Christian fellowship.⁷⁰¹ Graebner approvingly quotes from an article on the doctrine of fellowship and its application to relations with other Protestant denominations written by a Tennessee Synod pastor and published in 1915. The article concludes, “It is not because of the true, but of the false teachings which they maintain that we cannot consistently fellowship with them.” Graebner then asserts, “Agreement with the principle underlying this presentation would eliminate one of the greatest obstacles, if not the greatest, to Lutheran union.”⁷⁰²

Since the failure of the Intersynodical Movement to resolve the Election Controversy seems to have been at least in part due to differences in understanding the importance of clear doctrinal agreement for the expression of Christian fellowship, we will look at the development of fellowship agreements between the Ohio, Iowa, and Buffalo synods and their subsequent merger as well as their declaration of fellowship with the Norwegian Lutheran Church and the formation of the American Lutheran Conference.

Ohio, Iowa, and Buffalo Fellowship and Merger

The Ohio and Iowa synods from the time of the Election Controversy in the late nineteenth century had been united in their opposition to the Synodical Conference doctrine of election. However, there were other issues that separated the two of them. Ohio did not agree that only those doctrines in the Augsburg Confession that were in conflict at the time of the Reformation were binding upon adherents of the Augsburg Confession. Ohio also objected to Iowa’s teaching on so-called “open questions.”

⁷⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 102.

⁷⁰² *Ibid.*, 105.

In 1859 Iowa defined open questions in this way: “A question concerning which no symbolical (i.e., confessionally binding) decision has been put down in the confessional writings of our church, wherefore both ideas can stand next to each other in the church.”⁷⁰³ By open questions Iowa did not mean exegetical questions or questions not settled by Scripture but scriptural doctrines on which it was not necessary to agree for Lutheran synods to be in fellowship with each other. The Iowa Theses on Church Unity in 1867 stated:

Thesis I. The unity of the visible church consists in the pure preaching of the Gospel. This includes the administration of the sacraments.

Thesis II. Not only formal preaching but also the public confession of the church must be pure.

Thesis III. This public confession must hold fast without error, all articles of faith if the church is to be the true, i.e., the pure one.

Thesis IV. According to content, the Gospel is the doctrine of justification by faith, in connection with the other fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith.

Thesis V. Therefore, the unity of the church is truly a fundamental unity but not an absolute one, because it relates to the essential basic doctrines, not to all less important matters.

Thesis VI. Complete unity of doctrine has never existed in the church and must not be made the condition of fellowship.

Thesis VII. Fundamental or essential doctrines, however, are not only those which are fundamental for the individual Christian, but are all those which the Church has defined in its Confession.

Thesis VIII. Accordingly, the symbols contain the sum of doctrines on which doctrinal agreement is necessary.

Thesis IX. However, this does not refer to all unessential or incidentally mentioned doctrines in the confessions, but to all articles of faith; these must be recognized as definitely defined by the church.⁷⁰⁴

Although the Iowa Synod later modified the wording of its position on open questions and the necessary agreement for fellowship, the synod’s basic understanding of fellowship seems to have been consistent. The Michigan City Theses of 1893 state:

Thesis IV. *Open Questions*

3) Complete agreement in all articles of faith is the indispensable condition of church fellowship. Persistent error in any article of faith always causes divisions.

4) Complete agreement in all non-fundamental doctrines cannot be attained here on earth, but is nevertheless to be the goal after which to strive.⁷⁰⁵

⁷⁰³ George J. Fritschel, ed. *Quellen und Dokumente zur Geschichte und Lehrstellung der rev.=luth. Synode von Iowa u. a. Staaten*. (Chicago: Wartburg Publishing House, 192?), 263. (translation mine)

⁷⁰⁴ This English translation is included in Richard C. Wolf, *Documents of Lutheran Unity in America*. 209, document 92. The theses undoubtedly mean fundamental doctrines when they speak of articles of faith.

⁷⁰⁵ Wolf, *Documents of Lutheran Unity in America*. 214, document 95.

Ohio historically was closer to the Missouri Synod's insistence that agreement in all doctrine including the "non-fundamental" doctrines was necessary for church fellowship. In the course of time Ohio became less demanding. Even Matthias Loy, the acknowledged leader of Ohio who had always been close to Missouri's approach, modified his views.

The years 1893-1896 saw a growing interest in fellowship between the Ohio and Iowa.⁷⁰⁶ The participants in the Michigan City meeting which produced the theses by the same name recommended that the two synods declare altar and pulpit fellowship.

Groups in both synods, however, were not so eager to declare fellowship. The pastors who had left the Missouri Synod to join Ohio as a result of the Election Controversy were opposed to the Iowa Synod on the basis of the other doctrines that had historically divided Iowa from Missouri. They rejected Iowa's position on open questions and believed that complete doctrinal agreement was necessary for church fellowship. Some in Iowa believed that the Michigan City Theses smacked too much of theological Missourianism. One historian, however, notes, "Because Iowa's attitude toward fellowship was somewhat more liberal than Ohio's, the Iowa minority did not oppose fellowship with Ohio but it did disapprove of the Michigan City theses."⁷⁰⁷

The free conferences of the first decade of the 20th century brought Ohio and Iowa into a closer relationship. As the interest in these free conferences waned, Ohio and Iowa decided to meet for a renewed discussion of the Michigan City Theses.

Some in Ohio issued cautions. R.C.H. Lenski (1864-1936)⁷⁰⁸ was concerned about Iowa Synod fellowship practices because of Iowa's continuing fraternal relationship with the General Council. Lenski warned in an issue of the church periodical, *Lutherische Kirchenzeitung*,

⁷⁰⁶ Meuser, *The Formation of the American Lutheran Church*. 107.

⁷⁰⁷ Nelson, *The Lutherans in North America*, 347-348. See also Meuser, 95-102.

⁷⁰⁸ Lenski served as a theological professor at Ohio's Capital University from 1911 to his death in 1936. A prolific author, he is probably best known in Lutheran circles for his scholarly 12 volume commentary on the entire New Testament. He also served as editor of *Lutherische Kirchenzeitung* from 1904 to 1924.

If Iowa is going to hold its fellowship with the General Council, there is no prospect of closer relation between Ohio and Iowa. Close as the companionship in battle against Missouri has brought us, Iowa's continued fellowship with the General Council would build a wall separating us from her. Iowa cannot embrace the General Council with one arm and the Ohio Synod with the other. As things now stand, this is an "either-or" proposition.⁷⁰⁹

Meuser notes that while Lenski was concerned about the Iowa Synod's practice of fellowship, John Klindworth and others were opposed to the doctrinal stand of Iowa. Klindworth wanted a discussion to see whether Iowa would publicly renounce its errors on the confessions, open questions, and chiliasm. He also wondered about Iowa's stand on secret societies.⁷¹⁰

Iowa and Ohio met in Toledo, Ohio, in 1907 and produced the Toledo Theses.⁷¹¹ These theses were based on the Michigan City Theses with some minor changes. The statement on the Antichrist was removed. Iowa's doctrine of the church which seemed to confuse the essence of the church by making the marks of the church (the means of grace, the gospel in word and sacraments) something which makes the church visible rather than something that merely indicates that the church is present was still in evidence. The article on open questions still showed Iowa's reluctance to insist on complete agreement in doctrine and practice for fellowship. The changes favored Iowa's historic position rather than Ohio's.

Once again there was a mixed reaction. Iowa adopted the Toledo Theses in 1907. Ohio did not. Iowa was ready for fellowship based on agreement in the essentials. Ohio was not. One historian has noted that "in all the negotiations the Iowa Synod was more ready than the Joint Synod of Ohio to allow for differences of interpretation and variations in practice. It did not demand as complete agreement in doctrine and practice as the Ohio Synod."⁷¹²

A minority in Ohio saw the theses as glossing over the historic differences between the two synods. This minority lost its two main spokesmen when John Klindworth died on

⁷⁰⁹ R.C.H. Lenski, "Iowa and Ohio," *Lutherische Kirchenzeitung* 47 (1906), 732, quoted by Meuser, 116.

⁷¹⁰ Meuser, 116-117.

⁷¹¹ The Toledo Theses are printed in Wolf, *Documents of Lutheran Unity in America*, 216-219, document 96; and in Meuser, 292-293.

⁷¹² John Tietjen, *Which Way to Lutheran Unity? A History of Efforts to Unite the Lutherans of America*. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1966), 107.

December 1, 1907, and Henry Allwardt died on April 9, 1910. Many others believed that the two synods were in doctrinal agreement but Iowa's continued relation with the General Council was problematic. Ohio's opposition to the General Council was not only historic, it was also based on recent experience. The District Synod of Ohio, which had separated from the Ohio Synod in the 1860s and had joined the General Council, recently accepted into membership two congregations which had left the Ohio Synod because of the latter's stance against lodge membership. Ohio was understandably upset by this action

Iowa finally left the General Council as that organization was moving to unite with the General Synod and the United Synod, South, to form the United Lutheran Church in America (ULCA) in 1918. When Iowa severed its relationship with the General Council, fellowship between Ohio and Iowa became a reality.⁷¹³

The spirit in America that was willing to ignore doctrinal differences for the sake of outward union fit with Iowa's historic position on open questions and its understanding that fellowship was possible without full doctrinal agreement. That spirit had entered the Ohio Synod as well. Some outside observers took note of the Toledo Theses and saw the document as inadequate for establishing fellowship. The Wisconsin Synod's Adolf Hoenecke labeled the document "*Kompromissthese*." He concluded that Iowa had led Ohio into a trap.⁷¹⁴

In 1917 Pastor C.C. Hein, president of Ohio's Western District, in his address to his district in convention suggested that the Ohio Synod should foster relations not only with the Iowa Synod but also with the United Norwegian Church. His address was so well received that the district requested that it be published. Hein concludes,

Then there is the United Norwegian Church which, as it appears, is in accord with us in doctrine and polity. Should we not try to get into touch with that body as well as with Iowa, and so cultivate closer relations with our Norwegian brethren? It seems to us that the fostering of such relations with the Iowa Synod and the United Norwegian Church would be at least a step towards the realization of the vision of *one* Lutheran Church of America, which, though divided into several synods, would be none the less one in truth,

⁷¹³ Meuser, 120-160.

⁷¹⁴ Adolf Hoenecke, "Die Toledoer Unionsthese." *Theologische Quartalschrift*, 4 (April 1907), 118-119.

in doctrine, and in practice, grant mutual recognition, promote fellowship, and, as the Lord shows the way, also cooperate in the work of saving souls in a world which sorely needs the Gospel, and likewise in the upbuilding of our Lutheran Zion so dear to us all, and all this—the cultivation of closer relation and cooperation in common work—for the glory of God and the Lamb who has redeemed us with his most precious blood.⁷¹⁵

The moves to merge Ohio and Iowa into a new church body gained some momentum after the election of C.C. Hein as president of the Ohio Synod. By November of 1925 approval was given for a Joint Merger Commission which was to begin work on a plan for union before the end of the calendar year.⁷¹⁶ The comparatively smaller Buffalo Synod also asked to be included in the merger talks. There were still some problems to overcome but it seemed that it would only be a matter of time before the merger took place and a short time at that.

However, a controversy soon broke out over the inspiration and inerrancy of the Scriptures. The controversy came as a bit of a surprise because all seemed to be in agreement on the doctrine of Scripture. Most Midwestern Lutherans opposed the inroads of modernism and taught the total inerrancy of the Bible. The statement on Scripture in the Chicago (Intersynodical) Theses is unequivocal.

1) We pledge adherence to the Holy Scriptures as the only source and norm of doctrine and faith. (2 Tim. 3, 16; 2 Pet. 1, 19-21.) Over against modern theology we maintain, now as formerly, the doctrine of the verbal inspiration. (1 Cor. 2, 13; 2 Tim. 3, 16.) We believe and confess that Scripture not only contains God's Word, but is God's Word, and hence no errors or contradictions of any sort are found therein.⁷¹⁷

J. Michael Reu (1869-1943) of the Iowa Synod raised objections to the paragraph on Scripture in the constitution proposed for the new church body. The paragraph originally had read, "The Synod accepts and adheres to all the canonical writings of the Old and New Testaments as the written Word of God and the only source, norm and guide of faith and life." After some lengthy meetings the paragraph was strengthened to read, "The Synod accepts all the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments as the inspired and *inerrant* Word of God and

⁷¹⁵ C.C. Hein, "The Lutheran Church of the United States in the Jubilee Year 1917." (Columbus: Lutheran Book Concern 1917), 11.

⁷¹⁶ Meuser, 173.

⁷¹⁷ "Chicago Theses." in *Theologische Quartalschrift*. 26, (Oct 1929), 267.

the only source, norm and guide of faith and life”⁷¹⁸ (emphasis mine). Reu believed that inerrancy was a derived doctrine and as such was an “open question” which should not be insisted on as a condition of fellowship. He led opposition to a union based on such a demand even though he himself believed that the Scriptures were without error.

There was consternation in the Ohio Synod because of this opposition to the merger on the basis of the proposed constitution. An editorial in Ohio’s *Lutheran Standard* expresses the synod’s bewilderment.

Doubtlessly all delegates went to Synod fully expecting the union to take place, and it was only after they had got there that ominous reports were heard. Iowa held its meeting just the week before, and there, for some reason or other, certain opposition developed, apparently unexpectedly. The result was that, though union was voted for by an overwhelming majority, yet it was to take place only under certain conditions. These conditions the proposed constitution, to which the representatives of all three synods had agreed, had not provided for. . . Another condition, the more important, pertained to the word “inerrant” as applied to the Scriptures. The proposed constitution of the new body in the paragraph on its confession, has this section: “The Synod accepts all the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments as the inspired and inerrant Word of God and the only source, norm and guide of faith and life.” Iowa insisted that “inerrant” be removed from “Word of God” and placed before “source,” thus making the whole to read, “the inspired Word of God and the inerrant and only source, norm, and guide of faith and life.”

Possibly the change did not mean much, and again it may mean a great deal. But whatever the object of making the change was, the report that came before our body lacked a clear and satisfactory explanation of why the change was demanded, and in consequence it was impossible for the Joint Synod to vote intelligently on the question. . .

It appears that Iowa had not threshed the whole subject as thoroughly as Ohio had done and was therefore not prepared to take definite action, especially since the proposed constitution had not yet been considered by the districts.⁷¹⁹

Many in the Synodical Conference took note of these developments. Wisconsin’s John Meyer commenting on the editorial in the *Lutheran Standard* wrote,

The “Standard” is right about the proposed transposition of the word “inerrant”: it may not mean much, and again it may mean very much. Can it be possible that the Iowa Synod, by demanding the change, is trying to give shelter to an opinion which, though accepting in a general way the canonical books of both Testaments as the Word of God and as the infallible source, norm and guide in all matters pertaining to Christian faith and conduct, yet in the face of John 10, 35 and 2 Tim. 3, 16 dares to doubt the absolute

⁷¹⁸ Meuser, 184.

⁷¹⁹ “Union with Iowa and Buffalo.” *Lutheran Standard*. 83, (Sept 18, 1926), 598-599.

inerrancy of the Scriptures in all of its statements? We are reluctant to even consider this eventuality, let alone that we should permit this suspicion to gain a foothold in our mind. Unless we are convinced by irrefutable proof, we will not believe it, especially in view of the following theses on the authority of the Scriptures adopted by the Intersynodical Committee of Synodical Conference and the Synods of Ohio, Iowa and Buffalo: “Der modernen Theologie gegenüber halten wir nach wie vor fest an der Lehre von der Verbalinspiration. Wir glauben und bekennen, **dasz die Schrift nicht blosz Gottes Wort enhält, sondern dasz sie Gottes Wort ist, und das sich daher keinerlei Irrtümer oder Widersprüche, darin finden**” (emphasis Meyer’s).⁷²⁰

Meyer trusted the Iowa representatives on the Intersynodical Committee and believed that they were speaking for their whole synod. He tried to put the best construction on Iowa’s actions, but he may have been a bit naive. A scholar has recently commented concerning Reu’s position, “Here one can observe the old allegiance of the Iowa Synod to the theory of open questions and its idea of a gradual progress in the development of doctrinal formulations based on new exegetical insights through which God continues to be active in his church.”⁷²¹

After two and a half years of discussion Ohio acquiesced to the Iowa Synod and agreed to a formula on Scripture that was essentially the same as that Reu had suggested in 1926. The proposed constitution for the new American Lutheran Church in 1929 stated, “The Synod accepts the Canonical Books of the Old and New Testament as the inspired Word of God and the only infallible authority in all matters of faith and life.”⁷²²

As Ohio, Iowa, and Buffalo moved toward merger, they also moved toward fellowship with the Norwegian Lutheran Church and planned for a federation with several Scandinavian Lutheran churches in America. These actions were inconsistent with their involvement in the writing of the Chicago (Intersynodical) Theses. One must conclude that either they were less than forthright in stating their convictions in the Intersynodical Committee meetings or their members on the Intersynodical Committee did not truly represent the convictions of their synods

⁷²⁰ John P. Meyer, “Ohio-Iowa-Buffalo Merger Postponed.” *Theologische Quartalschrift*. 23, (Oct 1926), 281-282.

⁷²¹ Paul I. Johnston, “Johann Michael Reu and Inerrancy.” *Concordia Theological Quarterly*. 56, (Apr-July 1992), 152.

⁷²² Meuser, 222.

or the goal of outward unity had become more important than the inner unity of faith expressed in full doctrinal agreement.

The move toward fellowship with the Norwegian Lutheran Church was particularly troubling for the Synodical Conference. When it was announced in 1926 that the Ohio Synod was pursuing fellowship with the Norwegian Lutheran Church on the basis of the Minneapolis Theses, John Meyer expressed some surprise and shock at the developments. He had not even heard of the Minneapolis Theses. He noted the wrongs that had been committed against the minority who had left the Norwegian Synod at the time of the merger because they could not go along with the Madison Settlement or *Opgjør*. Meyer asked, “Are the synods of Ohio, Iowa, and Buffalo not aware of the unbrotherly and highly offensive treatment accorded to the ‘minority.’”⁷²³

Meyer also expressed a concern that an observation by Nathan R. Melhorn, junior editor of *The Lutheran*, the official organ of the United Lutheran Church in America, might be correct. Meyer quoted Melhorn’s observation from the September 16, 1926, issue of *The Lutheran* in which Melhorn comments on a meeting of the Ohio Synod which he had attended and on the Ohio, Iowa, Buffalo merger.

“I asked several men why they were willing at this time, perhaps eager, to combine with other general bodies. The most definite response I got was that there is need of a strong central group in the development of Lutheranism on the western continent. Since all the larger groups now existent extend from the Atlantic to the Pacific, ‘central’ evidently is not territorial. What they mean is a body whose doctrines and practices are between our United Lutheran Church and the Missouri Synod. We are deemed the liberal wing and Missouri the conservative group. While the proposed constitution does not label us, it is a safe guess that we were not forgotten when the instrument of government was framed.” -- He adds in another paragraph: “I think their willingness to dissolve their historic organization (in so far as a merger in which they are the largest part will dissolve it) lies in an honest disapproval of what they deem the liberal practices of the United Lutheran Church and the doctrinal ultra-conservatism of Missouri.”⁷²⁴

⁷²³ John P. Meyer, “What is the Purpose of Organizing ‘The Evangelical-Lutheran Synod of North America’?” *Theologische Quartalschrift*. 23, (Oct 1926), 285.

⁷²⁴ *Ibid.*, 284.

The proposed fellowship with the Norwegian Church seemed to be a move toward establishing a consortium of synods occupying the middle position between the ULCA and the Synodical Conference.

After Meyer had the opportunity to read the Minneapolis Theses he seemed to have approved of their content, including the statement on fellowship. Nevertheless he believed that by entering fellowship with the Norwegian Lutheran Church, Ohio, Iowa, and Buffalo would become a partaker of the Norwegian Church's sins. He also offered suggestions to make this a God-pleasing union.

The method to right this wrong is simple. The erroneous statements of the "Opgjoer" must be repudiated, the ambiguities must be replaced by unequivocal testimonies of the truth. That is one thing. The other is this: Those guilty of violating the consciences of their brethren, or acquiescing in such violations, owe their brethren an apology.

We hope that the synods of Ohio, Iowa, and Buffalo, who at present are seeking to bring about conditions of mutual recognition with the Norwegian Lutheran Church, improve the opportunity and secure the removal of the existing scandal, so that true and untarnished church fellowship may be established, in which all true Lutherans will rejoice.⁷²⁵

When Ohio announced in 1928 that fellowship had been declared with the Norwegian Lutheran Church, Meyer reacted with disappointment and concern.

What does this mean? Does it mean that the Ohio Synod subscribes to the Madison "Opgjoer" with its ambiguous language on election and man's "responsibility" in conversion? Does it mean that the Ohio Synod is willing to share the reproach for the treatment accorded by the Synod of the Norwegian Ev. Lutheran Church of America to the "minority", which protested against the "Opgjoer" for conscience' sake? Does it mean that the Ohio Synod spurns church fellowship with the Synodical Conference, which stood by the Norwegian "minority" and in vain administered brotherly admonition to the majority?⁷²⁶

Meyer saw the declaration of fellowship of the Ohio Synod with the Norwegian Lutheran Church as a major obstacle to fellowship with the synods of the Synodical Conference. Yet he asked that the Chicago (Intersynodical) Theses be considered on their own merit "irrespective of what course the establishing of pulpit and altar fellowship by the Ohio Synod with the Norwegian

⁷²⁵ John P. Meyer, "Church Fellowship (in reply to a question of the 'Pastor's Monthly')." *Theologische Quartalschrift*. 24, (Apr 1927), 165.

⁷²⁶ John P. Meyer, "Pulpit and Altar Fellowship Declared," *Theologische Quartalschrift*. 26, (Jan 1929), 57.

Church may force us to adopt.”⁷²⁷ The differences in the understanding of what was necessary for establishing church fellowship nevertheless doomed the Chicago (Intersynodical) Theses and future discussions between the synods of the Synodical Conference and the synods that would soon form the American Lutheran Church.

There were other differences in practice between the synods of the Synodical Conference and the Ohio, Iowa, and Buffalo synods that spelled problems for future church fellowship. These latter synods all participated in the National Lutheran Council. They claimed that their involvement did not involve church fellowship but only cooperation in externals. The synods of the Synodical Conference believed that membership in the NLC amounted to the practice of church fellowship without agreement in doctrine and practice.

The National Lutheran Council was founded in 1918 to meet three pressing needs: 1) to defend Lutherans against efforts to abolish foreign languages during the WWI anti-German hysteria; 2) to meet the need for emergency home mission ministry in the temporary communities growing up around shipyards and munitions factories; 3) the need to provide aid in reconstruction among European Lutherans because of the awful destruction and spiritual chaos in Europe caused by the war.⁷²⁸ The purpose of the NLC was to promote the following:

1. True and uniform statistical information concerning the Lutheran Church in America.
2. Publicity in all matters that require common utterance by the Lutheran Church.
3. Representation of our Church in its relation to entities outside of itself, without prejudice to the confessional basis of any participating body, as well as bringing home to the Church a consciousness of general and specific needs for attention and action.
4. Activities dealing with, or the creation of agencies to deal with, the problems arising out of war and other emergencies where no such common Lutheran agencies now exist, and to coordinate, harmonize, and unify the activities of existing agencies.
5. The coordination of activities and agencies of the Lutheran Church in America for the solution of problems arising from social, economic, intellectual or other conditions or changes affecting religious life and consciousness.

⁷²⁷ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁷²⁸ Frederick K. Wentz. *Lutherans in Concert: The Story of the National Lutheran Council, 1918-1966*. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1968), 13.

6. The fostering of true Christian loyalty and the maintenance of a righteous relation between Church and State as separate entities with correlated yet distinctly defined functions.⁷²⁹

The ULCA and some others thought that the various Lutheran groups in America shared enough doctrinal agreement to cooperate freely wherever needed. Others, like the Norwegian Lutheran Church, thought that the various Lutheran groups ought to work toward doctrinal consensus so that they could move into cooperation in internal matters. Iowa believed that so long as there was doctrinal disagreement there could only be cooperation in external matters. Wentz, however, notes that this latter “distinction was hard to make with any precision or agreement and almost impossible to apply in the face of emergency appeals for help.”⁷³⁰ The synods of the Synodical Conference would have agreed with Wentz’ remarks.

After the war the Iowa Synod protested that giving aid to churches and institutions in Europe that were “liberal or at least not sufficiently orthodox” was implying church fellowship where it did not exist. In 1920 Iowa actually left the National Lutheran Council over this issue.⁷³¹ The Ohio Synod experienced some inner turmoil because an Ohio element agreed with Iowa’s objections to the Council. When a revision to the NLC constitution in 1926 assured the member synods that the NLC was not going to become or take the power of a super church but rather was to function as an agency of the member churches, many of the fears concerning the NLC were dispelled. Therefore when Iowa, Ohio, and Buffalo merged in 1930 to form the American Lutheran Church, the new synod retained membership in the NLC. Meuser makes a telling comment about this pre-merger episode:

Throughout most of the long premerger history, Iowa displayed somewhat broader principles of church fellowship than did Ohio. In this case, strangely enough, it was Ohio that insisted on limited cooperation with the U.L.C.A while refusing to establish fellowship of pulpit and altar. This guarded, but real, friendship with the less strict segment of Lutheranism distinguished the American Lutheran Church from the

⁷²⁹ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁷³⁰ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁷³¹ Nelson, *The Lutherans in North America*, 406-407.

isolationist Synodical Conference and placed the new synod into a favorable mediating position in American Lutheranism.⁷³²

Contacts in the National Lutheran Council brought Ohio and Iowa into closer cooperation with the Norwegian Lutheran Church and the Augustana Synod. The synods in the NLC held several conferences in 1919 and 1920 to try to settle past problems between the Midwestern synods and the synods that had just merged to form the United Lutheran Church in America. Hans Stub produced his “Chicago Theses” in 1919 and presented them at the first conference held in March of that year. Although his theses received no formal recognition in the NLC, they were recognized when the Minneapolis Theses were adopted in 1925 by the synods that would form the American Lutheran Conference in 1930.⁷³³ The declaration of fellowship and subsequent participation in the American Lutheran Conference brought Ohio, Iowa, and Buffalo into fellowship with church bodies that had doctrinal differences with the synods of the Synodical Conference. In the years following the rejection of the Chicago (Intersynodical) Theses Missouri’s Theodore Graebner expressed criticism of these Scandinavian synods, aiming especially strong comments against the Augustana Synod.⁷³⁴

Ohio, Iowa, and Buffalo in the eyes of the Synodical Conference seemed at the very least to be inconsistent in working toward an agreement with the synods of the Synodical Conference while declaring fellowship with synods whose doctrinal position was contrary to the position of the Synodical Conference. At worst they were talking out of both sides of their mouth or being deliberately deceptive. The Chicago (Intersynodical) Theses could not resolve the Election Controversy because there was a difference in the understanding of the doctrine of church fellowship and what amount of doctrinal agreement was necessary for fellowship to be declared.

⁷³² Meuser, 235.

⁷³³ The five synods that formed the American Lutheran Conference were the Augustana Synod, the American Lutheran Church, the Norwegian Lutheran Church in America, the Lutheran Free Church, and the United Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church.

⁷³⁴ Graebner, *The Problem of Lutheran Union*, 44-99. Graebner criticizes Augustana for a lack of fellowship principles, millennialism, Sunday observance, etc.

Conclusion

The Intersynodical Movement in the second and third decades of the twentieth century was a significant attempt to resolve the Election Controversy of the nineteenth century. The Reformation anniversaries fostered an interest in Lutheran unity and union. Many were saddened by the divisions within American Lutheranism and tired of doctrinal controversy. The merger spirit in America at the time also encouraged larger organizations for the sake of efficiency in carrying out the work of the church and because larger organizations carried with them more prestige, respect, and influence. However, Lutherans in America were divided on what amount of doctrinal agreement was necessary for practicing church fellowship and cooperating in the work of the church. The Iowa Synod with her historic position on open questions was in step with the doctrinal indifference that had developed in America Christianity. The Ohio Synod also moved toward a more open understanding of what was necessary for church fellowship from her understanding in the late nineteenth and the first decade or so of the twentieth century. These developments can be seen in Ohio's move toward fellowship and merger with Iowa, and the declaration of fellowship with the Norwegian Lutheran Church and the Scandinavian synods in the American Lutheran Conference. The synods of the Synodical Conference insisted on complete doctrinal agreement for church fellowship. That agreement was to be seen in practices that were consistent with the doctrinal position. Ultimately, the Intersynodical Movement failed to resolve the Election Controversy because the participating synods were not unified in their understanding of the doctrine of fellowship and how much doctrinal agreement was necessary for the expression of fellowship.

The final chapter of the Election Controversy played out in the Intersynodical Controversy between the Missouri and Slovak synods on the one hand, and the Wisconsin and Little Norwegian synods on the other. This controversy ended the Synodical Conference. That will be the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER SIX

THE CONTROVERSY BETWEEN THE MISSOURI SYNOD AND THE WISCONSIN AND NORWEGIAN SYNODS

The final chapter of the Election Controversy played out in a very unexpected way. The Missouri Synod, which had been the chief proponent of Lutheran orthodoxy in America, succumbed to the prevailing attitudes in America and began to seek fellowship with the American Lutheran Church without resolving the historic doctrinal differences that separated these two church bodies, including the doctrine of election.

Missouri's moves toward fellowship with the ALC resulted in the Intersynodical Controversy which tore apart the Synodical Conference. In the view of the Wisconsin Synod and the Norwegian Synod,⁷³⁵ Missouri's change in the doctrine and practice of church fellowship necessitated a break with the Missouri Synod. The Intersynodical Controversy began in 1938 and culminated in fellowship ties being terminated in the early 1960s. This chapter demonstrates that Missouri's official change in the understanding of church fellowship resulted in a disregard for the historic differences between the Missouri Synod and the ALC in the doctrines of election, conversion, and open questions. The issues dating back to the Election Controversy became non-issues for the Missouri Synod while they remained issues for the Wisconsin Synod and the Norwegian Synod. In Missouri's quest for fellowship with the ALC the importance of doctrine faded into the background. The issue in the doctrine of election was not that Missouri had adopted election *intuitu fidei* but that the Missouri Synod was no longer concerned that such teaching must be clearly excluded by any confessional statement claiming to resolve past differences. As a result the Missouri Synod forfeited longstanding fellowship with the Wisconsin Synod and the Norwegian Synod.

⁷³⁵ The Norwegian Synod changed its name to the Evangelical Lutheran Synod in 1959.

Background

From its founding the Missouri Synod was concerned about the historic confessions and doctrines of the Lutheran Church. The concept of *pure doctrine* was part and parcel of the Missouri Synod spirit and a key factor in the synod's doctrine of church fellowship.

Most people in the twenty-first century have trouble understanding such an emphasis on the importance of doctrine and doctrinal agreement, but this emphasis was engrained in confessional Lutheranism from the time of the Reformation. Luther's was a *doctrinal* Reformation. At the Marburg Colloquy Luther and Zwingli apparently agreed on the first fourteen articles of the Marburg Articles but could not agree on the fifteenth which dealt with the Real Presence in the Lord's Supper. Although Zwingli was willing to declare fellowship in spite of this disagreement, Luther refused.⁷³⁶ The *Formula of Concord* (1577) emphasizes the importance of doctrine and doctrinal agreement when it declares concerning the *Augsburg Confession*: "This symbol distinguishes our reformed churches from the papists and other condemned sects and heresies. We appeal to it just as it was custom and tradition in the ancient church for later synods, Christian bishops, and teachers to appeal to the Nicene Creed and confess adherence to it."⁷³⁷

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the subjectivism of Pietism and the inroads of Rationalism served to undermine the importance of doctrine. Nevertheless a remnant of confessional Lutherans remained faithful to their Lutheran doctrinal heritage.

Confessional Lutheranism revived in the nineteenth century. When Frederick William III forced the Lutherans and Reformed to join in the so-called Prussian Union, a reaction among confessional Lutherans set in because they wished to preserve their Lutheran heritage. The Saxon

⁷³⁶ Martin Brecht. *Martin Luther: Shaping and Defining the Reformation 1521-1532*. trans by James L. Schaaf (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 332-333.

⁷³⁷ Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, "Concerning the Binding Summary, Basis Rule and Guiding Principle." par. 5.

immigration to Missouri was an attempt to preserve historic Lutheranism in the new setting because state church rationalism in Saxony and the spread of the Prussian Union ideals to other parts of Germany made it difficult for confessional Lutherans to practice their faith unhindered.

In America C.F.W. Walther became a leading voice for confessional Lutheranism through his publications, *Der Lutheraner* and *Lehre und Wehre*. He and the Missouri Synod opposed the ideas of the “American Lutherans” who wanted to make Lutheranism conform doctrinally to generic Protestantism in America. The Missouri Synod did not join in fellowship relations with the Buffalo Synod because of differences in the doctrine of the church and ministry and refrained from fellowship with the Iowa Synod because of the latter’s teaching on open questions and other doctrinal issues.

In 1868 the Missouri Synod and the Wisconsin Synod discussed the following theses on open questions drawn up by Walther. It was on the basis of their discussion of these theses that fellowship was entered by these two synods. To help understand the historic position of the Missouri Synod it may be helpful to read the entire fifteen theses.

THESIS I. It cannot be denied that in the field of religion or theology there are questions which, because they are not answered in the Word of God, may be called open in the sense that agreement in answering them is not required for the unity of faith and doctrine which is demanded in the Word of God, nor does it belong to the conditions required for church fellowship, for the association of brethren and colleagues.

THESIS II. The error of an individual member of the Church even against a clear Word of God does not involve immediately his actual forfeiture of church fellowship, nor of association of brethren and colleagues.

THESIS III. Even if an open error against the Word of God has infected a whole church body, this does not in itself make that church body a false church, a body with which an orthodox Christian or the orthodox church would abruptly have to sever relations.

THESIS IV. A Christian may be so weak in understanding that he cannot grasp, even in a case of a fundamental article of the second order,⁷³⁸ that an error which he holds is

⁷³⁸ “Fundamental doctrines pertain to the ‘fundamentum’ or foundation of saving faith, forgiveness of sin in Christ Jesus. Primary fundamental articles (e.g., person and work of Christ) are constitutive for saving faith and can neither be unknown nor denied without loss of salvation. Secondary fundamental articles (e.g., Holy Baptism, Lord’s supper) are related to the foundation of faith, but in such a way that one may be ignorant of them, yet have saving faith.” Erwin E. Lueker, ed. *Lutheran Cyclopedia* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1975), 319.

contrary to the Scriptures. Because of his ignorance he may also continue in his error, without thereby making it necessary for the orthodox church to exclude him.

THESIS V. The Church militant must indeed aim at and strive for complete unity of faith and doctrine, but it never will attain a higher degree of unity than a fundamental one.

THESIS VI. Even errors in the writings of recognized orthodox leaders of the Church, now deceased, concerning nonfundamental doctrines of the second order⁷³⁹ do not brand them as errorists nor deprive them of the honor of orthodoxy.

THESIS VII. No man has the privilege, and to no man may the privilege be granted, to believe and to teach otherwise than God has revealed in his Word, no matter whether it pertains to primary or secondary fundamental articles of faith, to fundamental or nonfundamental doctrines, to matters of faith or practice, to historical matters or other matters subject to the light of reason, to important or seemingly unimportant matters.

THESIS VIII. The Church must take steps against any deviation from the doctrine of the Word of God, whether this be done by teachers or by so-called laymen, by individuals or by entire church bodies.

THESIS IX. Such members as willfully persist in deviating from the Word of God, no matter what question it may concern, must be excluded.

THESIS X. From the fact that the Church militant cannot attain a higher degree of unity than a fundamental one, it does not follow that any error against the Word of God may be granted equal rights in the Church with the truth, nor that it may be tolerated.

THESIS XI. The idea that Christian doctrines are formed gradually and that accordingly any doctrine which has not completed such a process of development must be counted among the open questions, militates against the doctrine that the Church at all times is strictly one, and that the Scripture is the one and only, but fully sufficient source of knowledge in the field of Christian religion and theology.

THESIS XII. The idea that such doctrines as have not yet been fixed symbolically must be counted among the open questions, militates against the historical origin of the Symbols, particularly against the fact that these were never intended to present a complete doctrinal system, while they indeed acknowledge the entire content of the Scriptures as the object of faith held by the Church.

THESIS XIII. Also the idea that such doctrines in which even recognized orthodox teachers have erred must be admitted as open questions militates against the canonical authority and dignity of the Scriptures.

⁷³⁹ “Nonfundamental doctrines do not deal directly with the foundation of faith; therefore they may be unknown, even denied, without destroying saving faith, provided such a denial does not result from conscious opposition to Holy Scripture. Lutheran Dogmaticians generally include in them such doctrines as the unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost, immortality of man before the fall, eternal rejection of the evil angels, and the Antichrist.” *Ibid.*, 319. I have not found the term “nonfundamental doctrines of the second order” used by anyone other than Walther. It seems that he included in this classification things like a prohibition against paying interest which Walther considered a doctrine of Scripture.

THESIS XIV. The assumption that there are Christians doctrines of faith contained in the Holy Scriptures, which nevertheless are not presented in them clearly, distinctly, and unmistakably, and that hence they must be counted with open questions militates against the clarity, and thus against the very purpose of the divinity of the Holy Scriptures, which is offered to us as the divine revelation.

THESIS XV. The modern theory that among the clearly revealed doctrines of the word of God there are open questions is the most dangerous unionistic principles of our day, which will lead consistently to skepticism and finally to naturalism.⁷⁴⁰

Walther and the Missouri Synod were consistent in following these principles. They were patient in dealing with those whom they considered to be weak brothers. So long as a person was willing to listen to instruction from the Holy Scriptures they treated him as a weak brother. When a person or church body was no longer willing to be instructed from God's Word or demanded acceptance of their false teaching, they were considered persistent errorists with whom fellowship could not be practiced. The position of Walther and the Missouri Synod (until about 1940) on the doctrine and practice of church fellowship can be summarized in this way:

1. agreement on the complementary biblical principles that we are to admonish weak brothers and we are to separate from persistent errorists;
2. agreement that unity in all doctrine is necessary to church fellowship;
3. agreement that church fellowship is not limited to altar and pulpit fellowship but includes prayer;
4. concern that our actions will not cause offense, especially to the weak.⁷⁴¹

This was also the consistent understanding and practice of church fellowship among the synods of the Synodical Conference. The Ohio Synod in the late nineteenth century understood the principles of church fellowship in the same way. When it became apparent that there were real doctrinal differences among the synods of the Synodical Conference, the Ohio Synod left the Synodical Conference and broke fellowship relations with the Missouri and Wisconsin synods.

Walther and the Missouri Synod had been consistent in their practice of fellowship over against the Wisconsin Synod. In the first two decades of the Wisconsin Synod's existence the young synod had to wrestle with the question of what it meant to be a truly confessional Lutheran

⁷⁴⁰ The English translation of Walther's 1868 "Theses on Open Questions," is in *Doctrinal Statements of the WELS*. Prepared by the Commission on Inter-Church Relations of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1997.

⁷⁴¹ John Brug, "Walther and Fellowship." *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, 109, (Winter 2012), 35.

synod in America and what it meant to practice scriptural fellowship. In the early years many of the synod's pastors were willing to serve both Lutherans and German Reformed in spite of the doctrinal differences between the two groups. Nevertheless they were not entirely indifferent to doctrine. When some "American Lutherans" in Eastern synods issued a "Recension of the Augsburg Confession" contained in a document called *The Definite Synodical Platform* and mailed it anonymously to Lutherans throughout America in 1855, the young Wisconsin Synod rejected the document at its 1856 convention. The synod declared that "the adoption of the so-called Platform is nothing else but a definite suicide of the Lutheran Church."⁷⁴² The Recension removed from the Augustana the distinctive Lutheran doctrines that separated Lutherans from the generic sort of Protestantism that had developed in America.⁷⁴³

The Wisconsin Synod's confessional understanding improved as men with better Lutheran training and a greater confessional consciousness entered the ranks of the synod's pastors. To his credit the synod's first president, John Muehlhaeuser (1804-1867), did not stand in the way of the growing confessionalism. Nevertheless, as late as 1867 his confessional weaknesses were still evident. During the synod convention that year there were doctrinal discussions with representatives of the Iowa Synod. Iowa considered millennialism or chiliasm an "open question," a doctrine on which Lutherans could disagree and remain in fellowship. The minutes record that during the discussion Muehlhaeuser "cited a saying from Bengel (1687-1752)"⁷⁴⁴—

⁷⁴² *Wisconsin Synod Proceedings*, 1856. trans. by Arnold O. Lehmann, *WELS Historical Journal* 11, (April 1993), 6.

⁷⁴³ The five "errors" that the American Lutherans claimed needed to be eliminated from the *Augsburg Confession* were (1) the approval of the ceremonies of the mass, (2) private confession and absolution, (3) denial of the divine obligation of the Sabbath, (4) baptismal regeneration, and (5) the real presence of the body and blood of our Savior in the Lord's Supper. For the complete text of the Definite Synodical Platform see Richard C. Wolf, *Documents of Lutheran Unity in America*. 100-104.

⁷⁴⁴ Johann Albrecht Bengel has been called the foremost post-Reformation theologian in Württemberg. He was a New Testament scholar who was a pioneer in the textual criticism of the New Testament. His *Gnomon Novi Testamenti* was his greatest work and was widely used by Lutheran pastors. Bengel, however was a chiliast and predicted that the Millennium would begin in 1836.

You chiliasts can subscribe to the confessions with a good conscience. The 1000 year reign is not in the Augustana, but it is in the Bible.”⁷⁴⁵ Muehlhaeuser passed away that same year.

The Wisconsin Synod became a charter member of the General Council in 1867. The General Council was founded by Lutheran synods opposed to the lack of confessionalism in the General Synod (founded in 1820). The Ohio Synod sent representatives to the General Council, but did not join. Ohio wanted clarification on the following “Four Points” before they would commit to the new organization: chiliasm, altar fellowship, pulpit fellowship, secret societies. In 1868 Wisconsin resolved to withdraw from the General Council if adequate answers were not forthcoming.⁷⁴⁶ Wisconsin officially withdrew from the General Council in 1869 for confessional reasons.

Wisconsin’s Racine convention in 1868 was noteworthy not only for its stand on the “Four Points,” but also because of the stand taken over against the unionistic mission societies in Europe. These societies had provided the young synod with pastors and financial assistance, but had expressed displeasure at Wisconsin’s growing confessionalism. In fact, they informed the synod that because of Wisconsin’s convention discussions and resolutions in 1867 no more gifts and workers would be sent. The 1868 convention thanked the mission societies for all that they had done for them in the past, but stood firm against continued unionism.⁷⁴⁷ In 1868 the synod also resolved to make efforts to establish proper relations with the Missouri Synod. Missouri for some time had been criticizing Wisconsin’s practice in both *Der Lutheraner* and *Lehre und Wehre*. But after the colloquy with Wisconsin in October of 1868, Walther publicly declared in *Der Lutheraner*, “All of our reservations about the dear Wisconsin Synod have not only faded but have been put to shame. God be thanked for his inexpressible gift!”⁷⁴⁸ It was not until Missouri

⁷⁴⁵ *Wisconsin Synod Proceedings*, 1867. 14.

⁷⁴⁶ *Wisconsin Synod Proceedings*, 1868. 14-15.

⁷⁴⁷ Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, 35-36.

⁷⁴⁸ *Der Lutheraner*, Nov.1, 1868, 37. (translation mine)

recognized in 1868 that the Wisconsin Synod was in agreement with her in doctrine and practice that fellowship was declared.

In the early 20th century the Missouri Synod reiterated her understanding of the doctrine of church fellowship. In 1904 Missouri Synod Professor Gerhard Bente explained Missouri's position on fellowship with the Ohio and Iowa synods in an essay entitled, "Why Can't We Establish and Maintain Common Prayer Services with Iowa and Ohio?"⁷⁴⁹ In 1932 the Missouri Synod published the *Brief Statement*, a confessional statement authorized by Missouri's 1929 convention which had rejected the Chicago (Intersynodical) Theses.⁷⁵⁰ The committee appointed was to draft as quickly as possible a confessional statement in thesis form starting with the *status controversiae* (concerning those doctrines in contention in the Lutheran synods in America) presenting "the doctrine of the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions, in the shortest, most simple manner." The *Brief Statement* was based on Franz Pieper's formulation of 1897 entitled, "*Ich glaube, darum rede ich.*" Concerning the doctrine of fellowship the *Brief Statement* stated:

28. *On Church Fellowship.* – Since God ordained that His word *only*, without the admixture of human doctrine, be taught and believed in the Christian Church, 1 Pet. 4:11; John 8:31, 32; 1 Tim. 6:3, 4, all Christians are required by God to discriminate between orthodox and heterodox church-bodies, Matt. 7:15, to have church-fellowship only with orthodox church-bodies, and, in case they have strayed into heterodox church-bodies to leave them, Rom. 16:17. We repudiate *unionism*, that is, church-fellowship with the adherents of false doctrine, as disobedience to God's command, as causing divisions in the Church, Rom. 16:17; 2 John 9,10, and as involving the constant danger of losing the Word of God entirely, 2 Tim. 2:17-21.⁷⁵¹

Although Theodore Graebner would soon be critical of Missouri's historic doctrine and practice of church fellowship, he upheld Missouri's doctrine, in a book published in 1935 by explaining why fellowship between Missouri and the United Lutheran Church in America was not possible.

⁷⁴⁹ *Lehre und Wehre*, vol 51 #2 (February 1905), 49-53 and vol. 51 #3 (March 1905), 97-115. English translation in Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library essay files, (EF 124).

⁷⁵⁰ *Missouri Synod Proceedings*, 1929 (English), 112-113.

⁷⁵¹ *Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod*. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1932), 13.

Let us be clear on this point. Many have been led to regard Missouri as a legalistic body, which at once proceeds to curse with book, bell, and candle every person that does not conform to strict Lutheran standards in doctrine and practice. This is a false impression. We of the Missouri Synod are able to bear long, even within our own body, with those who err *through ignorance* or who *through weakness* fail to conform their practice to their Christian profession. But we insist that all errorists, and all who depart from sound churchly practice, shall be admonished and, if that fail, be publicly rebuked, and that, when no remonstrances are of avail, such a person shall be “rejected,” as Paul writes to Titus. Not because there is un-Lutheran practice, but because such practice is *openly tolerated*; not because there are errorists in the U.L.C., but because false teachers are permitted to sow their false doctrines unrebuked by their synodical body and are even recognized as leaders in the Church do we object to the easy and thoughtless conclusion that bodies subscribing to the same confessional platform should clasp hands and agree to “let bygones be bygones.”⁷⁵² [emphasis his]

In the same essay Graebner was quite critical of the doctrinal stance of the Scandinavian synods in the American Lutheran Conference, particularly the Augustana Synod. In an amazing about face he would soon be advocating fellowship with the American Lutheran Church which was a member of the American Lutheran Conference and thus in fellowship with those Scandinavian synods Graebner had criticized. Reasons for this about face will be offered later in this chapter.

Winds of Change

By the early 20th century some in the Missouri Synod began to think that there was a need to improve the public image of their synod. Missouri Synod Lutherans in the Eastern United States and those who were predominantly English speakers were particularly sensitive to the image of their synod as an insular, German-speaking church body. The anti-German spirit and hysteria that developed during World War I served to increase those concerns.⁷⁵³

In 1914 a group of Lutheran pastors and laymen in the Eastern United States founded the American Lutheran Publicity Bureau to help Missouri Synod congregations with publicity and advertising. “The men forming the Publicity Bureau clearly felt that the synod needed, and the

⁷⁵² Theodore Graebner. *The Problem of Church Union*. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1935) 43-44.

⁷⁵³ For a brief account of the anti-German spirit and the Lutheran response see Nelson, *The Lutherans in North America*, 396-403.

sooner the better, a major reform—one that would in some yet undefined manner deal with the bad public image created by its ‘conservative stance.’” The Bureau was a private endeavor and as such was not sponsored by the Missouri Synod.⁷⁵⁴ The Missouri Synod, however, recognized it as a para-church organization. In 1922 one of the founders of the Bureau explained the value of the organization.

From the beginning the Bureau proved itself a welcome addition to the forces of Synod, and while not an officially appointed or created body, it set itself wholeheartedly to further Synod’s interests. The fact that the Lutheran Church today can no longer be stigmatized generally as an “unknown Church,” and that it is throughout the country energetically presenting its case to the American people, is in some measure due to the activities of the Bureau. Its work has been perhaps primarily stimulative, suggestive, inspirational, seeking to arouse local circles and congregations to a policy of publicity for the previous wares they have to offer the souls of men.⁷⁵⁵

The American Lutheran Publicity Bureau soon gave birth to a periodical, *American Lutheran*, to promote the Missouri Synod through advertising and publicity and, indeed, to change the synod’s image.

In order to keep alive a general interest in the important cause of Lutheran publicity, and to encourage local congregations to a full use of their powers for the spreading of the Kingdom in their particular localities, the Bureau has since 1918 been issuing a magazine called the *American Lutheran*. This magazine has been an exponent of general matters pertaining to publicity, and has tried to advance the use of congregational efficiency. It has dealt with the practical side of church-work, and has endeavored to be helpful in suggesting modern methods of congregational work. Since it refrains from discussing doctrinal topics and does not bring devotional material, but confines itself to practical phases of church-life, it is really a Lutheran technical magazine, devoted to the cause of the expansion of the boundaries of Zion.⁷⁵⁶

Those who founded the Bureau set out to change the image of their synod, but in so doing also ultimately changed the doctrinal stance of their synod.

By creating a special unofficial organization within the synod to promote this reform, the Bureau members further implied that they held little hope for such reform to originate from official sources—the synod would not change of itself, but would have to be changed. Further by choosing to place its emphasis on practical, not doctrinal, matters,

⁷⁵⁴ Thomas Arnold Kuster. *The Fellowship Dispute in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod: A Rhetorical Study of Ecumenical Change*, (PhD Dissertation, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1969), 48

⁷⁵⁵ Paul Lindemann, “Publicity Work in the Missouri Synod,” in *Ebenezer: Reviews of the Work of the Missouri Synod during Three Quarters of a Century*. W.H.T. Dau, ed. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1922), 463.

⁷⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 464.

the Bureau implied that this new favorable impression of the Missouri Synod would not be made entirely on doctrinal grounds. Though they did not suggest a change in the synod's doctrinal position, they were suggesting that a doctrinal position should not be made the only basis for synodical identity. Although the fact was perhaps not recognized at the time, this slight shift in emphasis contained implications for the synod's traditional fellowship principle, for that principle takes for granted that a doctrinal position is the only relevant synodical identity in relation with outside groups.⁷⁵⁷

Although the Bureau claimed that the *American Lutheran* was only a "technical magazine" which suggested "modern methods of congregational work," in the 1930s and beyond it contained articles advocating fellowship with the ALC and promoting an understanding of church fellowship that was contrary to the historic practice of the Missouri Synod.

One might also wonder why the name of this periodical was chosen. Perhaps its founders merely wanted to shed the "German" image of the Missouri Synod. However, anyone with a knowledge of the history of Lutheranism in America would have recognized that "American Lutheran" was a loaded term. The "American Lutherans" in the nineteenth century sparked a controversy by issuing the *Definite Synodical Platform* with its *American Recension of the Augsburg Confession*. This document, issued anonymously, removed from the Augsburg Confession anything that smacked of Roman Catholicism and was at odds with the generic Protestantism that had developed in America. The "American Lutherans" thought that the only way that Lutheranism could survive in America was by accommodating its doctrine to the American religious scene. The *Definite Synodical Platform* was rejected by the majority of Lutherans in America.⁷⁵⁸

Some also began to react to what they perceived as a near-sighted legalism in applying Missouri's fellowship principles and lovelessness in matters of adiaphoron (things which God has neither commanded nor forbidden). Concerned individuals met at least four times (1926, 1937,

⁷⁵⁷ Kuster, *The Fellowship Dispute in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod*, 49.

⁷⁵⁸ For an overview of this "American" Lutheran controversy see David A. Gustafson, *Lutherans in Crisis: The Question of Identity in the America Republic*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

1940, and 1941) in an attempt to counter these trends.⁷⁵⁹ In the 1940s an unnamed author (Theodore Graebner?) writing in defense of those who were challenging Missouri's doctrine of fellowship listed a number of examples of what he considered legalistic or loveless behavior. His frustration is obvious.

In 1936 I wrote to a friend: "More important than unionism is the question whether we shall become a legalistic body in which men can be accused and attacked even behind their back without the least regard to friendship as soon as they transgress some abstract principle accepted in our Synod, without being guilty of violating any Word of God on which that principle is built. I have often referred to this process as the 'isolating of a principle.' Anything seems fair against the man who makes a gesture contrary to the traditions received among us. I despair of ever making clear to this type of Missourian the Bible concept of unionism or that of separation of Church and state. They have suffered a hardening of brain fibre on these spots."

I wrote a brother who wanted an article on bowling alleys in parish houses thus, March 14, 1934: "Knowing the legalism which has taken root in our Synod, and which ignores all adiaphora, an article like this would be considered as an official condemnation and the demand would be made that congregations conform or get out. I have seen this intolerance in action and often wish that those guilty would spend some time reading the older issues of *Der Lutheraner* and *Lehre und Wehre* and thus recapture the original Missouri Synod attitude on these questions."⁷⁶⁰

No doubt, the fact that two Missouri Synod pastors brought charges against members of the Concordia, St. Louis Seminary faculty for signing their names to the Chicago (Intersynodical) Theses angered many in the synod. The two men complained that Missouri's Intersynodical Committee had publicly assented to false doctrine in signing their names to the theses when chapter D of the theses contained doctrinal error. These charges were brought to the 1932 Missouri Synod convention which found their accusations unjustified. The 1935 Missouri Synod convention also rejected the appeal of these two pastors. When they appealed to the 1936 Synodical Conference convention, the Synodical Conference also found the charges unsustainable.⁷⁶¹

⁷⁵⁹ *Speaking the Truth in Love: Essays Related to A Statement, Chicago, Nineteen Forty-five.* (Chicago: The Willow Press, n.d.), 17

⁷⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁷⁶¹ The preceding summary of the Hanssen/Melcher case is based on the more complete report in Bunzel, *The Missouri Synod and the Chicago (Intersynodical) Theses*. Masters Thesis, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri. May 1964. 66-71.

Some of those who noted the legalism and lovelessness in their synod eventually challenged their synod's doctrine of fellowship rather than dealing with the legalist application of that doctrine. They chafed under what they saw as a legalistic spirit and an unhealthy synodical pride in Missouri's orthodoxy and correctness. They thought that their synod was too inflexible and isolationist and they set out to change it. The opinions of these men gained momentum and began to dominate. In fact, a recent Missouri Synod publication has admitted that "for something like 25 years prior to 1969 the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod was controlled by a coalition of liberals and moderates."⁷⁶²

In 1935 Pastor J. F. Pfotenhauer (1859-1939) was voted out of office as president of the Missouri Synod and Pastor John Behnken (1884-1968) was elected in his place.⁷⁶³ Whether the delegates thought that Pfotenhauer was simply getting too old for the office of synod president (he was nearly 74 at the time) or whether the vote was an indication that the majority in the synod wanted a change in leadership to project a new image of the synod or to lead the synod toward more openness to relations with other Lutherans is difficult to determine. Nevertheless, the election of Behnken did mark a turning point in Missouri's history. Although no one could ever deny Behnken's personal Lutheran orthodoxy or accuse him of not being a Christian gentleman, he lacked Pfotenhauer's ability to exercise firm doctrinal discipline. Missouri was also striving to rid herself of her reputation as a German immigrant church. The strong anti-German spirit fostered by America's involvement in WWI and new developments in Nazi Germany no doubt contributed much to that desire. With her strong emphasis on doctrine, the authority of Scripture, confessional Lutheranism, and strict fellowship principles, Missouri was out of step with the

⁷⁶² John Strietelmeier in *The Cresset* quoted by Thomas Baker, *Watershed at the Rivergate*. (Sturgis, MI: n.p., 1970). Quoted by Paul A. Zimmermann, *A Seminary in Crisis: The Inside Story of the Preus Fact Finding Commission*. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2007), 27-28.

⁷⁶³ John W. Behnken, *This I Recall* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), 47-48. Behnken's account of the interchange between these two men prior to the final vote reveals the humble Christian character of Pfotenhauer.

times. Pfotenhauer was the last of the Missouri Synod presidents to have been born in Germany. Behnken was the first to be born in America.

Missouri – Wisconsin Controversies

In 1935 the United Lutheran Church in America (ULCA)⁷⁶⁴ extended an invitation to the synods of the Synodical Conference to meet to consider closer relations. Upon receiving the invitation President John W.O. Brenner (1874-1962) of the Wisconsin Synod appointed a committee to bring a recommendation to the 1935 synod convention. This ad hoc committee became the Standing Committee on Church Union.⁷⁶⁵ He also requested a member of that committee, Pastor Edmund Reim (1892-1969), to deliver at the upcoming synod convention an essay he had previously prepared for a convention of the Northern Wisconsin District of the Wisconsin Synod. The essay was entitled, “Church Fellowship and Its Implications.” Reim added an additional section to the paper for the synod convention, “With Additional Notes on the Possibilities of Lutheran Union.” Pastor Henry C. Nitz (1893-1968) was asked to deliver an essay entitled “Another Gospel.” Both essays were intended to help the Wisconsin Synod meet the challenges of the modern ecumenical age in general and the Lutheran union movements in particular. Both the Wisconsin and Norwegian synods declined the invitation of the ULCA. Missouri representatives met twice with ULCA representatives, but talks ended on a disagreement concerning the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures.⁷⁶⁶

In June 1934 the Atlantic District⁷⁶⁷ of the Missouri Synod drafted a memorial to the synod to set up an Army and Navy Commission to recommend men to the United States government for service as military chaplains. The very next year the US government made an

⁷⁶⁴ The ULCA was a result of the 1918 merger of the synods of the General Synod, the United Synod-South, and the General Council. It was the most liberal of the major Lutheran synods.

⁷⁶⁵ The Standing Committee on Church Union was the forerunner of the synod’s Doctrinal Commission. Later it became known as the Commission on Inter-Church Relations.

⁷⁶⁶ *Missouri Synod Proceedings*, 1941. 286. See also *Missouri Synod Proceedings*, 1938, 227-228.

⁷⁶⁷ The Atlantic District and the non-geographical English District of Missouri took the lead in changing Missouri’s direction.

official request to the Missouri Synod for chaplains. The 1935 convention of the Missouri Synod passed a resolution authorizing an Army and Navy Commission to investigate the assurances which had been given that Missouri's principles would be honored by the government. At the time the Missouri Synod met in convention only every three years. By the next convention in 1938 there were several Missouri Synod chaplains serving in the armed forces.

The Wisconsin Synod received the same request from the U.S. government, but took different action. The 1937 Wisconsin Synod convention recommended appointing a committee to look into the issue and bring a report back to the 1939 convention. The 1939 convention decided not to recommend or commission Wisconsin Synod pastors for the chaplaincy service because the fundamental principle of separation of church and state is violated by such appointments and because it would become a practical impossibility for such chaplains to practice sound doctrine and confessional Lutheranism once they were in the military.⁷⁶⁸ The 1941 convention unanimously rejected participation once again, this time adding that appointments to the chaplaincy conflicted with the synod's doctrinal stand on the divinity of the call and noted the doctrinal indifferentism that pervades the regulations of the War Department. Such doctrinal indifferentism fosters unionism.⁷⁶⁹

Wisconsin's decision on participation in the military chaplaincy was not easy to make as war clouds loomed on the horizon and the nation was eventually drawn into the conflict nor was it necessarily popular. President Brenner wrote letters to the Office of Civilian Defense giving assurances that the synod was not pacifist, that between 6,000 and 7,000 of our members were willingly serving in the armed forces (1942), and that the synod was active in distributing religious materials to their members in the service while appointing their own camp pastors whenever possible. He also pointed out that the synod believes that the work and responsibilities of the civil government and the church are not to be confused or mixed. A second letter

⁷⁶⁸ *Wisconsin Synod Proceedings*, 1939. 67-68.

⁷⁶⁹ *Wisconsin Synod Proceedings*, 1941. 43-44.

explained by way of quotes from the government's chaplaincy manual why the synod could not endorse men for the chaplaincy. Brenner wrote, "In our estimation the 'civilian camp pastor' of the First World War came much closer to meeting our requirements." The Wisconsin Synod's General Synodical Committee⁷⁷⁰ resolved that the two letters be printed and sent to the pastors and teachers of the synod.⁷⁷¹ In 1943 the synod also requested the synod-wide distribution of Dr. Martin Luther College President Carl Schweppe's (1892-1969) essay, "The Government Chaplaincy: An Appraisal."⁷⁷²

Wisconsin's decision not to participate in the military chaplaincy program was difficult to make even before the involvement of the United States in World War II, but became even more painful after Pearl Harbor. Missouri's participation involved her pastors in many compromising situations and led to unionistic practices. No doubt, Missouri leaders and members wanted to be seen as loyal Americans. They tried to put safeguards in place to protect their principles. For instance, in 1938 Missouri resolved that "the Commission (Missouri's Army and Navy Commission) will endorse only such applicants as will not violate the principles of separation of Church and State nor be involved in unionistic practices."⁷⁷³ They also received some assurances from the government that chaplains would not be required to do anything contrary to their religious principles. The government, however, had no grasp of the doctrine of fellowship. The U.S. Armed Forces required chaplains to be the pastor of all the men in their unit. They were told, "When a soldier is assigned to a permanent unit, the chaplain without favoritism because of

⁷⁷⁰ The General Synodical Committee served as a sort of executive committee for the various areas of ministry for the Wisconsin Synod. Later this committee became the Coordinating Council with more far-reaching responsibilities. Today it is called the Synodical Council.

⁷⁷¹ The first letter was dated 11-2-42. The second was dated 3-31-43. The two letters were printed together according to the request of the General Synodical Committee, but there is no publication date indicated. Several copies are in a folder labeled "Military Chaplaincy" in the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library's vertical file.

⁷⁷² For the Report of the Spiritual Welfare Commission and the resolution authorizing the publication of the Schweppe pamphlet see *Wisconsin Synod Proceedings*, 1943. 30-31, 71.

⁷⁷³ *Proceedings of the Missouri Synod*, 1938. 160.

national origin or religious denomination becomes his pastor, his confidant, and his friend.”⁷⁷⁴

Chaplains were warned, “The chaplain is the servant of God for all, and no narrow sectarian spirit should color his utterances, nor should his personal work assist only a special group.”⁷⁷⁵ In time of war chaplains in the government’s employ found it very difficult to uphold scriptural fellowship principles. What was done at first perhaps only in emergency eventually became accepted practice for some. The ALC’s *Lutheran Standard* printed this account from one of her chaplains in 1945:

This is not the end of the story. My orders stated to proceed also to APO so and so for the purpose of attending a chaplain’s conference. Again I was delayed but arrived just in time to take part in a Lutheran Communion service. Here I was deeply impressed by the fact that in far away Assam a missionary from Madras, a former Buffalo Synod brother, a *Missouri Synod chaplain*, two Lutheran enlisted men, and I, American Lutheran, could kneel side by side to take the Lord’s Supper.⁷⁷⁶ (emphasis mine)

The military chaplaincy also led the Missouri Synod into cooperation with the National Lutheran Council. Missouri officials claimed that their efforts involved only *cooperation in externals*, but at least one historian has noted that the first meeting between Missouri and the National Lutheran Council (1/20/41) accomplished “a minor breach in the wall of the Missouri Synod.”⁷⁷⁷ In 1951 Missouri entered into a joint communion agreement with the National Lutheran Council which allowed chaplains of each group to commune members of the other in an emergency.⁷⁷⁸

The Missouri Synod’s desire to become more American can also be seen in the change in its attitude toward participation in the Scouting movement. Few things might seem more un-American than voicing objections to the Scouting movement, but in the early twentieth century

⁷⁷⁴ Wm R. Arnold, Chief of Chaplains, Office of the Chief of Chaplains, Washington D.C. Circular Letter #266 (1/15/43), 4. Chaplains Folder no. 2, Vertical File, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library.

⁷⁷⁵ *Training Manual 2270-5*, June 10, 1937. Section V, 15. Chaplains Folder no. 2, Vertical File, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library.

⁷⁷⁶ *Lutheran Standard*, June 23, 1945, p. 5.

⁷⁷⁷ Nelson, *The Lutherans in North America* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975) 478.

⁷⁷⁸ For a detailed discussion of Missouri’s involvement in the military chaplaincy with the implications for the doctrine and practice of church fellowship see Mark E. Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods: Events That Led to the Split between Wisconsin and Missouri*. (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2003) 74-102.

all of the synods in the Synodical Conference had religious objections to the organization. In 1927 an entry in the *Concordia Cyclopedia* produced by the Missouri Synod stated, “Considering that the Boy Scout movement seeks to develop character and virtues and love to God, the organization not only has a religious character, but seeks to do on the basis of natural religion what can only be done by means of the Gospel.”⁷⁷⁹ Objections to the organization revolved around the works righteous spirit that permeated Scouting, the Scout Oath and Law, and the unionistic worship services that were part of Scout jamborees and camps. In 1917 or 1918 Theodore Graebner wrote a pamphlet on Boy Scout morality. He summed up the problems with Scouting in this way,

1. Scouting has a moral, even a religious purpose, which it wants to attain without the use of the Law and the Gospel. It aims at character without conversion.
2. While the Scout obligation has not the form of an oath, yet it is officially called an oath and is treated as having the force of an oath.
3. Its custom of receiving reports on daily “good turns” tends to foster a pharisaic pride.
4. Inasmuch as the scout troops are bound up in a local organization, they are frequently called upon for joint (unionistic) worship and work.⁷⁸⁰

Many wondered whether the objectionable features of Scouting could be removed so that congregations within the Synodical Conference might be able to sponsor troops. The Missouri Synod’s Board for Young People’s Work began working with the Boy Scout organization to see whether exceptions could be made to the general policies of Scouting. The Board reported to the Missouri Synod in convention in both 1935 and 1938 that much progress had been made.⁷⁸¹

In 1944 Missouri’s Saginaw convention opened the door for congregational participation in the Boy Scouts of America. The synod adopted a report which declared that there was, “no Boy Scout authority that supersedes the authority of the local Pastor and the Congregation in any

⁷⁷⁹ *The Concordia Cyclopedia* ed. by L. Fuerbringer, Th. Engelder, and P.E. Kretzmann (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1927), 90. The three editors were professors at the Missouri Synod’s seminaries.

⁷⁸⁰ Quoted in Carl J. Lawrenz, “The History of the Boy Scout Issue.” Presented at a special Michigan District Convention, WELS, held at Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Michigan, June 28-29, 1951. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library, (EF 758), 3.

⁷⁸¹ Schuetze, *Synodical Conference: Ecumenical Endeavor*, 243-244.

place of the program affecting the spiritual welfare of Lutheran men and boys in Scouting.” The convention resolved that “the matter of Scouting should be left to the individual Congregation to decide and that under the circumstances Synod may consider her interests sufficiently protected.”⁷⁸²

The Wisconsin Synod and the Norwegian Synod took a different path. In 1951 Carl Lawrenz explained Wisconsin’s objections to participating in the Scouting movement.

Why have we consistently held that our young Christians cannot identify themselves with the program which Scouting offers? Why do we hold that the church cannot use the program of Scouting for the purpose of training its own children for a God-pleasing life? A great deal might be said here. At this point, however, we shall concentrate on the religious objections which we are compelled to raise against the mandatory features of the Boy Scout program. Every Boy Scout must know and subscribe to the Scout Oath or Promise and the Scout Law. These mandatory features are the very heart and essence of the Scouting program. They have not changed and cannot change. To give up these mandatory features and not make them obligatory for every Scout would mean giving up the very program of Scouting.⁷⁸³

⁷⁸² *Missouri Synod Proceedings*, 1944. 257-258.

⁷⁸³ Carl Lawrenz, “The History of the Boy Scout Issue.” 1-2. Lawrenz continues, “The Scout Oath asks every Boy Scout to say: ‘On my honor I will do my best to do my duty...to God...’ *Thereby Scouting endeavors to lead boys to do their duty to God without conversion*. A Christian youth will say: ‘For Jesus’ sake and by the power of his grace and pardon I will strive to do my duty to God.’ In Galatians 2:19-20 we hear: ‘For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.’

The Scout Oath says: ‘On my honor I will do my best...to keep myself morally straight.’ By asking every Boy Scout, regardless of his religion, to make this promise *Scouting aims to train character without the Gospel*. God’s Word says (Ro 8:8): ‘So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.’

The Scout Oath itself is condemned by God’s Word. If the phrase ‘on my honor’ is not to be a meaningless babbling, if it is not to be an expression of arrogant self-reliance, and thus a gross abuse of God’s gift of our honor—then it is an implied reference to God, the giver and preserver of our honor. It is an oath no matter how much men may try to tone it down, and a God-displeasing oath. We cannot leave it to the Scout authorities to decide whether it is an oath or not. They may be personally sincere enough in the answer which they give to us, but this cannot decide the matter for us. If we ask a Catholic theologian whether there is anything in Catholicism that is against the Bible, he would unequivocally deny this. Yet we would feel constrained to form our own judgment on the basis of God’s Word. We need to do the same thing when we judge the religious features found in Scouting. Concerning its Oath we need to heed the Savior’s word in Matthew 5:33-37.

Of greater concern for the Wisconsin Synod and her Synodical Conference sister synod, the little Norwegian Synod, was Missouri's move toward fellowship with the American Lutheran Church (ALC).⁷⁸⁴ The ALC had extended an invitation to Missouri to meet for discussions on future fellowship. Neither the Norwegian Synod nor the Wisconsin Synod received this invitation. In 1938 the ALC declared at its Sandusky convention: "We are firmly convinced that it is neither necessary nor possible to agree in all non-fundamental doctrines."⁷⁸⁵ Earlier that year the Missouri convention resolved that its 1932 confessional declaration, the *Brief Statement*, together with the "Declaration of the Representatives of the American Lutheran Church" be regarded as the doctrinal basis for future church fellowship.⁷⁸⁶ The convention also declared that "we endeavor to establish full agreement" and indicated that the practice of the ALC needed to be in harmony with their doctrinal position, particularly in regard to the issue of lodges. The president of the Missouri Synod was given authority to declare fellowship when full agreement was reached. The sticking point was the discussion of non-fundamental doctrines (particularly those which had historically been at issue between Missouri and Iowa—the Anti-Christ, the

Scouting compromises our Christian confession which we are to make before the world. The 12th Scout Law says: 'A Scout is reverent.' This is explained to mean that he is faithful in his religious duties. Yet it defines neither these religious duties nor the God whom he is to serve. Scouting is basically syncretistic and unionistic. It holds that the work of the various religious bodies serves the carrying out of the Scout program. At the same time it imagines that its own program will materially aid all religious programs in carrying out their educational work. Scouting assumes that such an integration can be effective with benefits to both parties under the tacit assumption that Scoutism as such represents what is basic to all religions. This is the spirit which Scouting naturally engenders by insisting on belief in God but allowing all forms of worshipping God to be of equal value. With its practical declaration that all religions are of equal value, that all religious education, whether based on man's innate goodness or solely on God's grace in Christ Jesus, is equally effective for true character building, Scouting produces a unionistic view of life, even though upon request unionistic worship may be discouraged.

⁷⁸⁴ The ALC was a result of the merger of the Ohio, Iowa, and Buffalo synods in 1930. There were a number of doctrinal issues that had historically separated these synods from Missouri and Wisconsin including the various doctrines in contention during the Election Controversy of the 19th and early 20th centuries and Iowa's historic position on "Open Questions."

⁷⁸⁵ *American Lutheran Church Proceedings*, 1938. 255.

⁷⁸⁶ *Missouri Synod Proceedings*, 1938. 231.

conversion of the Jews, the Millennium, etc). The ALC also had some problems with the wording of the *Brief Statement*.⁷⁸⁷

Some in the Missouri Synod soon raised concerns over the synod's actions. In 1939 *The Crucible*, edited by Dr. William Oesch, and published in London, England, showed the dangers involved in Missouri's actions. In 1940 Pastor Paul Burgdorf of the Missouri Synod began publishing *The Confessional Lutheran* to demonstrate that the "St. Louis Union Resolution" was unacceptable.⁷⁸⁸ A number of memorials at future conventions also called for the rescinding of the 1938 resolution.

The *American Lutheran*, whose stated purpose was practical matters of publicity and public relations, began running articles advocating fellowship with the ALC. The periodical seems to have been well-funded, was professionally produced, and attained a relatively sizeable readership, particularly among Missouri Synod pastors in the Eastern United States. *The Confessional Lutheran* was privately published by pastors and had a smaller readership, mainly in the Midwest. An analysis of the argumentation of the two periodicals may prove helpful.

The American Lutheran

1. (The need for fellowship)
 - a. in American Lutheranism: Other Lutherans are becoming more conservative. (4)
 - b. in Christendom in general: A united Lutheranism could be a vital force (6)
 - c. in world in general: critical world situation requires Lutheran cooperation. (4)
 - d. Therefore to remain aloof in view of the need would hurt the synod's image. (3)
2. (Fellowship is popular): Cooperation & union are favored both inside & outside the synod.(3)
3. (Lutheran divisions cannot be defended in the case of ALC & Missouri)
 - a. Agreement on all points of teaching is not

The Confessional Lutheran

1. (MAJOR) The only proper basis for fellowship is total agreement in doctrine and practice. (10)
2. (MINOR) This proper basis has not been achieved between the ALC and Missouri. (6)
- Doctrinae Defendendae: (4)
 - a. fellowship
 - b. the Church
 - c. the Last Things
 - d. Scripture
 - e. Election and Conversion
3. (CONCLUSION)

⁷⁸⁷ *Missouri Synod Proceedings*, 1938. 232. For a more detailed discussion of the St. Louis resolutions and the implications of those resolutions see Mark Edward Wangerin, *A Historical Evaluation of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod Fellowship Principles*. (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary, 1978), 13-15.

⁷⁸⁸ Armin Schuetze, *The Synodical Conference*, 277. Promoting the cause of union with the ALC were Missouri Synod contributors to the *American Lutheran* published by the American Lutheran Publicity Bureau and the *Crescent* published by Valparaiso University.

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| necessary for union. (1) | The 1938 Union Resolutions should be rejected. (1) |
| b. Agreement on a certain formulation of words is not necessary for union. (3) | 4. The synod's new stance is is damaging its image. (4) |
| c. The current divisions are not caused. by doctrine (7) | |
| d. Whatever doctrinal differences exist are not divisive. (1) | 5. Those who favor fellowship under the present circumstances are not to be trusted. (8) |
| e. Therefore, there is enough doctrinal agreement for fellowship between ALC and Missouri (3) | |
| 4. Those who oppose fellowship under the present circumstances are not to be trusted.(10) | |
| a. Union negotiators on both sides are to be fully trusted (3) | 6. Public protest against opponents is justified. (5) ⁷⁸⁹ |

The Missouri Synod was a house divided. The *Confessional Lutheran* raised many of the same objections as were raised by the Wisconsin and Norwegian synods. However, the opinions of the *American Lutheran* eventually prevailed in Missouri.

Both the Norwegian and the Wisconsin synods reacted with concern to Missouri's agreement with the ALC. The Norwegian Synod declared that they could not regard the documents as an adequate basis for future church fellowship.⁷⁹⁰ The Wisconsin Synod held that the ALC's Sandusky resolutions indicated that doctrinal agreement had not been reached. The synod also declared, "Not two statements should be issued as a basis for agreement, a single joint statement, covering the contested doctrines thetically and antithetically and accepted by both parties to the controversy, is imperative; and furthermore, such doctrinal statement must be made in clear and unequivocal terms which do not require laborious additional statements. The sincerity of the statement must also be evidenced by a clean church practice."⁷⁹¹ Negotiations between representatives of the ALC and ULCA and the agreement reached between the two at

⁷⁸⁹ Analysis by Kuster, *The Fellowship Dispute in the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod*. 100. The numbers show, on a 1 to 10 scale, the relative emphasis (in terms of how often the argument occurs) given to each, with the most-used argument rating 10.

⁷⁹⁰ J. Herbert Larsen and Juul B. Madson, *Built on the Rock: The Evangelical Lutheran Synod Seventy-fifth Anniversary, 1918-1993* (Mankato: Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1992), 90. For the ELS account of the entire controversy with Missouri see 84-107.

⁷⁹¹ *Wisconsin Synod Proceedings, 1939*, 60.

Pittsburgh in 1940⁷⁹² made it evident that there was no real doctrinal agreement between the ALC and Missouri.

Part of the problem for the Wisconsin and Norwegian synods and for some in Missouri was the ALC's continuing membership in the American Lutheran Conference.⁷⁹³ This conference included the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America⁷⁹⁴ formed by the merger of Hauge Synod, the Norwegian Ev. Lutheran Church in America, and the United Norwegian Lutheran Church in America in 1917. The merger was based on the Madison Settlement (*Opgjør*) of 1912, a compromise agreement which allowed the doctrine of election to be taught in two conflicting ways. In 1918 thirteen pastors and a number of congregations which refused to participate in the merger formed the Norwegian Synod of the American Ev. Lutheran Church or the Evangelical Lutheran Synod as it is known today. The merged Norwegian synod was a participant in the founding of the National Lutheran Council in 1918, the Lutheran World Council in 1923, and the Lutheran World Federation in 1946.

The ALC saw no contradiction between her agreement with Missouri and her continued membership in the American Lutheran Conference. As the ALC declared in 1938, "That the Brief Statement viewed in the light of our Declaration is not in contradiction to the Minneapolis Theses⁷⁹⁵ which are the basis of our membership in the American Lutheran Conference. We are not willing to give up this membership."⁷⁹⁶ The American Lutheran Church also continued to

⁷⁹² The Pittsburgh Agreement between the ULCA and the ALC was an attempt to resolve the differences which precluded fellowship between the two synods, particularly on the issues of secret societies and the inspiration of Scripture. "Although both bodies technically accepted the Agreement, it was with such reservations and limiting conditions that the document proved ineffectual." Richard C. Wolf. *Documents of Lutheran Unity in America*, 372. Wolf includes an abridged version of the Pittsburgh Agreement on pages 378-379.

⁷⁹³ The American Lutheran Conference was a federation of the ALC, Augustana Synod, ELC (Norwegian), Lutheran Free Church, and UELC (Danish). The Conference was formed in 1930. In 1953 the Augustana Synod withdrew and in 1960 the remaining synods merged to become The American Lutheran Church.

⁷⁹⁴ In 1946 this synod adopted the name *The Evangelical Lutheran Church*.

⁷⁹⁵ Adopted in 1925 by the Buffalo, Iowa, Ohio and merged Norwegian synods, the "Minneapolis Theses" formed the doctrinal basis for both the American Lutheran Church and the American Lutheran Conference.

⁷⁹⁶ *American Lutheran Church Minutes*, 1938. 255-256.

pursue fellowship with the United Lutheran Church in America.⁷⁹⁷ In 1946 the American Lutheran Church approved the practice of “selective fellowship” with pastors and parishes of other Lutheran synods, including Missouri and the ULCA, which agreed with the declarations contained in Sections 1, 2, 3 and 4 of Article II—Confession of Faith of the Constitution of the American Lutheran Church.⁷⁹⁸ The practice of selective fellowship was contrary to the Missouri Synod’s principles, but instances of Missouri pastors and congregations practicing such fellowship with pastors and congregations of the ALC were evident. This was an issue for the Wisconsin and Norwegian synods.

In 1940 the Synodical Conference asked Missouri not to enter fellowship with the ALC and to consider the advisability of framing one document of agreement.⁷⁹⁹ Missouri’s 1941 convention resolved to continue negotiations with the ALC, but recognized the desirability of having one document establishing doctrinal agreement. Missouri asked its sister synods to send representatives to the joint meetings of the committee to prepare this document. Both the Wisconsin and Norwegian synods declined. Dr. J. Michael Reu (1869-1943) of the ALC in a published article intimated that the ALC might object to the inclusion of the ELS and the Wisconsin Synod in the discussions because his church body had not invited the other two synods previously for reasons of its own.⁸⁰⁰

In 1944 Missouri and the ALC produced the joint document “Doctrinal Affirmation.”⁸⁰¹ The “Doctrinal Affirmation” was an attempt to provide the single document that Wisconsin had earlier asked for to demonstrate that the previous doctrinal differences between the Synodical Conference and the ALC were now settled.

⁷⁹⁷ *American Lutheran Church Minutes*, 1942. 254-255.

⁷⁹⁸ *American Lutheran Church Minutes*, 1946. 279-280.

⁷⁹⁹ *Synodical Conference Proceedings*, 1940. 89, 92. See 81-92.

⁸⁰⁰ *Wisconsin Synod Proceedings*, 1943. 65. See Schuetze, *Synodical Conference: Ecumenical Endeavor*. 278.

⁸⁰¹ *Doctrinal Affirmation of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States and of the American Lutheran Church*. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1944).

Not everyone in the Missouri Synod was satisfied with this product. Theodore Dierks (1899-1959) privately published a 63 page examination of the “Affirmation” urging that the document be rejected. At the very beginning of the document he set forth his reasons.

A careful analysis reveals much ambiguity, weakness of confession, insufficient rejection of error, compromising statements. We should be fully prepared to demand a clear confession of faith to establish unity before considering union with any church body not now in fellowship with us.

The present document is not a clear and sharply defined, adequate confession of faith, it leaves room for views which have rightly been barred by the Brief Statement, discards the Brief Statement’s clear confession of inspiration and infallibility of every word of Scripture, leaves room for a false doctrine of conversion, introduces false doctrine in regard to the election of grace, does not bar false doctrine in regard to the object and effect of the Lord’s Supper, permits the false doctrine of a visible side of the Church when defining its essence, removes the Scriptural bar to unionism, particularly allows churches to disagree in non-fundamental doctrines, does not reject all forms of chiliasm, as Scripture does, does not take a definite position in the doctrine of the Antichrist, permits un-Scriptural doctrine regarding the conversion of the Jews, does not reject false doctrine concerning the resurrection of the martyrs.

It subverts the Scriptural position of the Missouri Synod.

It must be rejected!⁸⁰²

Both the Norwegian and the Wisconsin synods saw this effort as an improvement over using two documents for the resolution of doctrinal differences, but neither synod saw the document as a satisfactory statement or settlement of the historic differences between the ALC and Missouri. The Norwegian Synod believed that the “Doctrinal Affirmation” had weakened the Brief Statement. Wisconsin was not satisfied that all previous errors had been excluded.⁸⁰³

A Missouri Synod committee tried to meet the objections of the two sister synods and proposed some clarifications to the ALC committee. The ALC in convention failed to approve the “Doctrinal Affirmation”⁸⁰⁴ because the delegates believed that the document failed to safeguard the ALC’s position in certain articles. Consequently the Affirmation ceased to function

⁸⁰² Theodore Dierks, *An Examination of the Proposed Doctrinal Affirmation*. (Theodore Dierks, 1945?), 3.

⁸⁰³ Schuetze, *Synodical Conference*, 279

⁸⁰⁴ *American Lutheran Church Minutes*, 1946, 280.

as a working document. As a result the Missouri Synod in 1947 reaffirmed the *Brief Statement* and set aside the other union documents as a basis for fellowship with the ALC.⁸⁰⁵

At the 1944 convention Missouri made an official distinction between “joint prayer” and “prayer fellowship.” The synod claimed that “joint prayer” at intersynodical conferences, asking God for his guidance and blessing upon the deliberations and discussions of his Word, did not militate against its previous stand of no prayer fellowship with errorists so long as such prayer did not imply denial of truth or support of error.⁸⁰⁶ This resolution involved a departure from long-standing Missouri Synod and Synodical Conference teaching on fellowship and gave official sanction to false practice.

Another issue that had come to the fore by this time involved cooperative efforts between the Missouri Synod and synods outside its fellowship. Missouri called these joint efforts “cooperation in externals.” Wisconsin believed that some of the things Missouri termed “externals” were not, and some things that were “externals” were leading Missouri’s pastors and people into unionistic practices.

Wisconsin Synod President Brenner sent a letter to the Synodical Conference in 1944 protesting that “we have been seriously perturbed by numerous instances of an anticipation of a union not yet existing, or as it has been put, not yet declared.”⁸⁰⁷ As a result of this letter the Synodical Conference established a Committee on Intersynodical Relations consisting of the presidents and two appointed men from each synod.⁸⁰⁸ The two Wisconsin Synod men appointed were Pastors Edmund Reim and Arthur P. Voss (1899-1955) both of whom would soon become professors at the Wisconsin Synod’s seminary.

Meanwhile there was growing evidence of disunity within the Missouri Synod. A group of some forty-four pastors and professors, including four district presidents, five members of the

⁸⁰⁵ Schuetze, *Synodical Conference*, 278-280.

⁸⁰⁶ *Missouri Synod Proceedings*, 1944, 251-252.

⁸⁰⁷ *Synodical Conference Proceedings*, 1944, 101-102.

⁸⁰⁸ Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, 200-201.

St. Louis faculty, and the editor of the *Concordia Theological Monthly* and the *Lutheran Witness*, met to discuss “a strange and pernicious spirit” that had invaded their synod.⁸⁰⁹ The result of the meeting was the issuance of “A Statement” consisting of twelve propositions with comments. Some of the propositions contain warnings that are always valid for confessional Lutherans. Others challenged the exegesis of Romans 16:17-18 and the historic fellowship practice of the Synodical Conference. Number six opened the door to selective fellowship and would have made it virtually impossible for a synod to maintain doctrinal discipline among its pastors and congregations.

Five – *We affirm our conviction that sound exegetical procedure is the basis for sound Lutheran theology.*

We therefore deplore the fact that Romans 16:17, 18 has been applied to all Christians who differ from us in certain points of doctrine. It is our conviction based on sound exegetical and hermeneutical practices, that this text does not apply to the present situation in the Lutheran Church in America.

Six – *We affirm the historic Lutheran position concerning the central importance of the una sancta and the local congregation. We believe that there should be a re-emphasis of the privileges and responsibilities of the local congregation also in the matter of determining questions of fellowship.*

We therefore deplore the new and improper emphasis on the synodical organization as basic in our consideration of the problems of the Church. We believe that no organizational loyalty can take the place of loyalty to Christ and His Church.

Eight – *We affirm our conviction that any two or more Christians may pray together to the Triune God in the name of Jesus Christ if the purpose for which they meet and pray is right according to the Word of God. This obviously includes meetings of groups called for the purpose of discussing doctrinal differences.*

We therefore deplore the tendency to decide the question of prayer fellowship on any other basis beyond the clear words of Scripture.⁸¹⁰

President John Behnken received a copy of “A Statement” in September of 1945 as he was about to leave on a foreign trip. He asked that it not be published until he had the opportunity to meet with the signers. The proponents of the “Statement of the Forty-four,” as it

⁸⁰⁹ The signers included Professor William Arndt (1880-1957), Professor Paul Bretscher (1893-1974), Professor Theodore Graebner (1876-1950), Professor William Polack (1890-1950) and eventual Lutheran Hour preacher, Oswald Hoffmann (1913-2005).

⁸¹⁰ The entire text of “A Statement” eventually known as “The Statement of the Forty-four” is printed in *Moving Frontiers*. Carl S. Meyer, ed. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), 422-424; and in *Speaking the Truth in Love: Essays Related to A Statement, Chicago Nineteen Forty-five* (Chicago: The Willow Press, n.d.), 7-9.

came to be known, published it anyway. The publication provoked a storm of protest both inside and outside the Missouri Synod. Behnken appointed a committee to deal with “A Statement.” This Committee of Ten met with ten representatives of the signers. The report of the Committee of Ten called for firm doctrinal discipline because “A Statement” espoused exegesis and practice that would disrupt the unity that had always characterized the Missouri Synod. Nevertheless, Behnken ignored the recommendation of his committee, met with the signers on his own, and allowed the document to be withdrawn from consideration rather than retracted as containing error.⁸¹¹

Behnken’s actions were a foretaste of Missouri’s future handling of discipline. In 1948 the Norwegian Synod complained about Missouri’s response to those who were participating in unionistic worship services and other unionistic activities.

We have continued to hope that the Missouri Synod would take action against the offenders, and we have awaited such action with patience. Instead, the offenders have not only been continued as members in good standing, and in such offices as they held, but some have even been assigned to new offices and given greater responsibilities. Offended brethren and synods have been given very little comfort, if any, when protests have been made.⁸¹²

This pattern of dealing with doctrinal problems continued. In 1947 Missouri disposed of the “St. Louis Union Resolution” of 1938 without admitting that the resolution had been wrong or even ill advised. In 1956 Missouri gave the *Common Confession* a non-functioning status without admitting that this document had not settled the doctrinal differences between Missouri and the ALC. This unwillingness or inability to exercise doctrinal discipline was a major factor leading to the break in fellowship.

⁸¹¹ See Curtis A. Jahn, “‘A Statement’ of the Forty-four: the Dam Breaks Loose in Missouri,” Senior church history paper, 1981. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, WI.

⁸¹² *Synodical Conference Proceedings, 1948*, 147-149.

Before 1947 the Wisconsin Synod's synodical periodical, *Northwestern Lutheran*, did not make many direct comments about developments in the Missouri Synod.⁸¹³ According to a *Northwestern Lutheran* editorial, it had been the magazine's policy "with but a few exceptions" not to discuss the issues dividing the two synods. There had been an agreement of sorts with the editors of Missouri's periodicals to refrain from discussing the controversial issues in periodicals designed for the laity. Wisconsin's theological journal, *Theologische Quartalschrift* (now called *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*) kept the pastors informed of the various developments. The pastors were expected to provide their people with the information they needed.⁸¹⁴

Before 1947 articles in the *Northwestern Lutheran* did discuss unionism and the doctrine of fellowship and reported on actions taken at Missouri Synod conventions. However, from 1947 the *Northwestern Lutheran* took an active role in presenting the issues involved in the growing controversy with Missouri. Reim explained the reason for the change in policy.

Indications are that this year of 1947 will be one of momentous decisions, in which the eyes of Lutherans everywhere, liberal as well as conservative and confessional, will be fixed on our sister synod, eagerly seeking to determine what its future stand will be.

Under such conditions, our members are surely entitled to know where our Wisconsin Synod stands, and why it stands as it does. We therefore intend to take up these various matters in a series of articles, to discuss the issues involved, and to explain our position and the reason for it. We know full well that only such reasons as are thoroughly founded in God's Word will prevail.⁸¹⁵

Reim followed with a series of articles discussing everything from the Missouri/ALC "Doctrinal Affirmation" to cooperation in externals. Beginning in 1949 Reim published a series of articles under the heading "Where Do We Stand." After the appearance of the *Common*

⁸¹³ See Joseph M. Wright. "'I Have Made You a Watchman': How the Northwestern Lutheran Prepared the Wisconsin Synod for the Break in Fellowship with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod." Senior church history paper, 1995. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary.

⁸¹⁴ E. Reim, "A Time to Keep Silence, and a Time to Speak." *Northwestern Lutheran*, April 13, 1947, 115.

⁸¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 115.

Confession Reim began a series entitled, “As We See It.” From 1950 to 1955 Reim wrote over fifty articles for this series.⁸¹⁶

The *Quartalschrift*⁸¹⁷ kept the synod’s pastors abreast of developments in Missouri, the Synodical Conference, and American Lutheranism in the “News and Comments” section of the journal. Convention reports and resolutions, excerpts from other magazines, and confessional statements were often reprinted so that readers could see for themselves.⁸¹⁸ The *Quartalschrift* also published numerous major essays on key doctrinal issues, exegetical articles on key sections of Scripture, and important historical studies. Every effort was made to ground pastors in the truth and to keep everyone in the synod walking together doctrinally.

The vast majority of the numerous articles, essays, pamphlets, and convention resolutions produced by the Wisconsin Synod during the long controversy with Missouri were not vindictive or vituperative. More often than not the tone was apprehension, sadness, frustration, and Christian concern toward the Missouri Synod, the members of the Wisconsin Synod, and future generations. An article by Professor Max Lehninger illustrates these attitudes and emotions.

We dare not close without expressing our concern about the growing estrangement between our Synod and our sister synod of Missouri, which is torn by strife in its own midst. Of late, the men in authority in our sister synod are either unable or not willing to cope with certain of their own members who, under the guise of external cooperation, are actually practicing fellowship with men from whom the Synodical Conference has been divided on doctrinal grounds for many years. It is not just an isolated occurrence any more, but an ever growing number of them, which fills our hearts with deep apprehension.⁸¹⁹

Who are we to disagree with such a large body of men who have held aloft the banner of Lutheran orthodoxy for over a century, a synod, which by its example has strengthened us when we were weak, to which we are sincerely grateful, and for which we have great love in our hearts? We tremble in the consciousness of our unworthiness, our

⁸¹⁶ Wright, “‘I Have Made You a Watchman’: How the Northwestern Lutheran Prepared the Wisconsin Synod for the Break in Fellowship with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod,” 14-27.

⁸¹⁷ The *Theologische Quartalschrift* was renamed *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* in 1960.

⁸¹⁸ See Steven J. Pagels, “Sounding a Clear Trumpet Call: The Role of the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* in the Break in Fellowship with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.” Senior church history paper, 1999. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, WI.

⁸¹⁹ Max Lenhininger, “The Development of the Doctrinal Position of the Wisconsin Synod during the Century of Its History,” *Quartalschrift: Theological Quarterly*, 47, (April 1950), 106.

weaknesses and failings. But for the sake of our own and the salvation of those coming after us we cannot do otherwise than witness the truth against all gainsayers, and be they nearest and dearest to us.⁸²⁰

The disposal of the “St. Louis Union Resolution” and the “Doctrinal Affirmation” did not reverse Missouri’s course. In 1949 the Wisconsin Synod convention resolved to have President Brenner address six question to the 1950 Missouri convention regarding specific violations of Missouri’s teaching on unionism as presented in the *Brief Statement*. Wisconsin called for a direct answer that would clarify Missouri’s position by public disavowal or removal of the offenses that had been given. The questions addressed participation of Missouri’s pastors in intersynodical laymen’s organizations like the Lutheran Men in America, cooperation with other Lutheran welfare agencies in which that work was inseparably associated with spiritual implications, cooperation with the National Lutheran Council in matters which even the *Lutheran Witness* recognized as no longer externals, etc. The question was pointedly asked whether the Missouri Synod still held to its former position that Romans 16:17 applies to all errorists whether Lutheran or not. That question was followed by another—if so, what will be done to correct the growing impression that this is no longer the case?⁸²¹ Missouri’s convention directed Behnken to draft a reply to Wisconsin’s questions. The response politely rejected Wisconsin’s claims that violations had been committed.⁸²²

A new joint ALC/Missouri document, the *Common Confession*, was presented to both the Missouri and ALC conventions in 1950. Missouri accepted the confession as a statement of doctrine in harmony with the Scriptures. The Norwegian Synod pastoral conference meeting in November concluded that the *Common Confession* fell far short of its intended purpose. Some in the Norwegian Synod were already recommending an *in statu confessionis*⁸²³ declaration over against Missouri. The Wisconsin Synod meeting in convention in August 1951 declared that the

⁸²⁰ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁸²¹ *Wisconsin Synod Proceedings*, 1949. 111-113.

⁸²² Schuetze, *Synodical Conference*, 285-286.

⁸²³ An “*in statu confessionis*” declaration is a declaration that a group is in a state of protesting fellowship, the final step before declaring a break in fellowship.

Common Confession was unacceptable in its statements on justification, conversion, election, the means of grace, Scripture, and inspiration.⁸²⁴

Some concerned individuals now began to leave the Missouri Synod. In 1951 Professor Paul Kretzmann, a professor at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis and the author of the four-volume *Popular Commentary of the Bible*, and a few others withdrew from Missouri and formed the Orthodox Lutheran Conference.⁸²⁵

In 1952 the Norwegian Synod directed an overture to the Synodical Conference that sufficient time be allotted on the agenda for a thorough discussion of the *Common Confession* and the continued doctrinal negotiations between the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church. The preamble of the Synodical Conference's floor committee's report concerning the *Common Confession* stated that the confession in its present form was inadequate as a settlement of differences and that the document had disturbed the unity of the Synodical Conference. The convention, however, dominated by the Missouri Synod, struck the preamble. A substitute motion was passed to postpone all further action on the subject until Part II of the *Common Confession* was available.⁸²⁶ The voting showed a deeply divided Synodical Conference with the Missouri and Slovak synods on one side and the Norwegian and Wisconsin Synods on the other. Because of the size of their synod Missouri had the majority of delegates at the convention. That majority reacted vocally in approval or disapproval of those who spoke in favor or against the *Common Confession*. The Wisconsin delegation met privately and declared that they were *in statu confessionis* with the Missouri Synod.⁸²⁷

⁸²⁴ *Wisconsin Synod Proceedings*, 1951. 145. See p.110-149.

⁸²⁵ The Orthodox Lutheran Conference was formed on September 26, 1951. Its members had previously signed *Confession of Faith Professed and Practiced by All True Lutherans*. The Conference disbanded about 1962 with some of the members entering the Wisconsin Synod in 1963. A remnant of the Conference continues to exist as the Concordia Lutheran Conference. In 1964 some members of the Orthodox Lutheran Conference together with other Missouri Synod dissidents formed the Lutheran Churches of the Reformation.

⁸²⁶ *Synodical Conference Proceedings*, 1952. 158-159.

⁸²⁷ Schuetze, *The Synodical Conference*, 299-303. Armin Schuetze was present at this convention.

In 1953 Missouri and the ALC completed Part II of the *Common Confession* in an attempt to meet the objections to Part I that had been raised both within the Missouri Synod and outside it. Part II was published too late for consideration at Missouri's convention, so the discussion of it was postponed until 1956. Missouri in those years met in convention every three years. Wisconsin's convention met in August and again in October 1953. Pastor Winfred Schaller, the secretary of the synod, presented a proposal to the convention requesting a break in fellowship with Missouri.⁸²⁸ The synod in convention adopted the following resolution. Because of its significance, it is quoted at length.

1. That we declare that the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod
 - a) By reaffirming its acceptance of the Common Confession as "settlement of past differences which are in fact not settled (Proc. 1951, page 146), and
 - b) By its persistent adherence to its unionistic practices, (the Common Confession, joint prayer, scouting, chaplaincy, communion agreement with the National Lutheran Council, cooperation in externals; negotiating with lodges and Boy Scouts of America with the plea that this gives opportunity to bear witness, under the same plea taking part in unionistic church federations; negotiating for purposes of union with a church body whose official position it is that it is neither possible nor necessary to agree in all matters of doctrine and which contends for an allowable and wholesome latitude of theological opinion on the basis of the teachings of the Word of God) has brought about the present break in relations that is threatening the existence of the Synodical Conference and the continuance of our affiliation with the sister Synod.
2. That we without delay make this declaration known to the President of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, to the President of the Synodical Conference, and to the other Presidents of the constituent synods.
3. That we herewith approve the Protest agreed upon by our representatives immediately following the St. Paul convention of the Synodical Conference, 1952.
4. That we prevail upon the President of the Synodical Conference to arrange a program for the convention that would devote its sessions to a thorough consideration of our declaration in Point 1 and of the doctrinal issues involved.
5. That the Conference of Presidents make a special effort during the coming year to provide all our congregations with thorough instruction regarding the issues and doctrines involved.
6. That while during the period up to the next meeting of the Synodical Conference we, in view of President Behnken's offer, still anxiously and prayerfully await an indication that the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod will not persist in its present stand as set forth in Point 1, we remain in a state of confession.
Gal. 6:1-2: Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ.

⁸²⁸ *Wisconsin Synod Proceedings*, 1953. 105-106.

Rom. 15:5-6: Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another, according to Christ Jesus; that we may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.⁸²⁹

In the tumultuous year of 1953 the aging President Brenner announced that he would not stand for re-election. Pastor Oscar J. Naumann (1909-1979) was elected in his place.⁸³⁰ A change in presidents, however, did not mean a change in direction or attitude. Under Naumann the Wisconsin Synod continued to protest the Missouri Synod's deviations from what Wisconsin saw as the historic doctrine and practice of the Synodical Conference.

In 1953 Missouri prepared a pamphlet entitled, "A Fraternal Word," in order to explain its position on the issues in controversy. This publication began a pamphlet war between Missouri and Wisconsin. Wisconsin replied to "A Fraternal Word" with "A Fraternal Word Examined." Missouri followed with "Another Fraternal Endeavor." In early 1954 Wisconsin produced eleven tracts covering all of the main issues between the two synods. The tracts were published under the general theme, "Continuing in His Word." Most of them dealt with the *Common Confession* and Missouri's continuing negotiations with the ALC.⁸³¹ Missouri then published a final pamphlet, "A Fraternal Reply." All of the pamphlets were sent to all of the pastors of the Synodical Conference.⁸³²

As requested by Wisconsin in 1953, the 1954 Synodical Conference convention gave all of its attention to seven essays on the issues in controversy. Three essays concerned the *Common Confession*, one each by a representative of the LCMS, Wisconsin Synod, and the Norwegian Synod. Two essays presented the military chaplaincy and Scouting, one by an LCMS representative and one by a Wisconsin Synod representative. Two essays covered various other

⁸²⁹ *Wisconsin Synod Proceedings*, 1953. 104-105.

⁸³⁰ *Wisconsin Synod Proceedings*, 1953. 7.

⁸³¹ The eleven eight-page tracts were entitled, 1) Lutheran Bodies in the U.S.A, 2) 1938-1953; 3) Every Sinner Declared Righteous; 4) Not By My Own Reason or Strength; 5) If the Trumpet Gives an Uncertain Sound; 6) Chosen by Grace from Eternity; 7) Our Position against Scouting; 8) Cooperation in Externals; 9) Antichrist; 10) Prayer Fellowship; 11) The Chaplaincy Question. Tract #4 spoke of the historic differences between Missouri and the synods of the ALC on conversion. Tract #6 addressed the historic difference on the doctrine of election.

⁸³² Schuetze. *Synodical Conference*, 305-307.

issues related to fellowship, one each by Missouri and Wisconsin. President Naumann appointed Pastor Edward C. Fredrich (1917-1995) and Pastor Ernst H. Wendland (1916-2009), two relatively young men of the Michigan District, to present the essays on Scouting and the military chaplaincy and the *Common Confession*. Undoubtedly his purpose was to demonstrate that the younger generation in the Wisconsin Synod (and perhaps the Michigan District) were on the same page doctrinally as the older generation. The venerable president of Northwestern College, Erwin E. Kowalke (1887-1973), presented the third.⁸³³

Fredrich explained Wisconsin's opposition to the chaplaincy in accord with the Wisconsin Synod's objections voiced already in 1941. The chaplaincy conflicts with the doctrine of the divinity of the call, it violates the principle of separation between church and state, and it fosters unionism. Fredrich voiced four basic objections to scouting: 1) Scouting has objectionable religious features, 2) the Scout oath or promise is an oath condemned by the Bible, 3) even in a church troop Scouting retains its objectionable features, 4) the Missouri Synod has changed its position on scouting. Membership in such an organization therefore involves a contradiction to the testimony of a confessional Lutheran church. Fredrich noted that as late as 1941 Missouri in convention voiced objections to participation in the movement.⁸³⁴

Wendland noted that the *Common Confession* was to be faulted not so much for what it said, but for what it did not say. The *Common Confession* did not contain false doctrine *per se*, but permitted false doctrine to stand and claimed to settle doctrinal issues including the doctrine of election that were not in fact settled. In his clear and incisive style President Kowalke

⁸³³ The titles of the three essays are "The Military Chaplaincy and Scouting," by E.C. Fredrich, "The Inadequacy of the Common Confession as a Settlement of Past Differences," by E. H. Wendland, and "Unionism, the Communion Agreement, Negotiating with Lodges, and Joint Prayer," by E.E. Kowalke. Prof. Schuetze provides a summary of the essays on the *Common Confession* presented by Pastor Wendland, LCMS Pastor Nickel, and ELS Prof. Norman Madson in *Synodical Conference: Ecumenical Endeavor*, pp. 308-317. The Missouri Synod essays: Th.F. Nickel, "A Defense of the Common Confession in Order to Preserve the Wonderful Gift of Fellowship of Truth as Found in the Synodical Conference These Many Years." M. Scharlemann, "The Boy Scouts of America and the Military Chaplaincy." A. Grumm, "Other Issues Causing Tension between Wisconsin and Missouri." Norwegian Synod essay: N. Madson, "The Norwegian Synod's Reasons for Rejecting the Common Confession." All of the essays are printed in the *Synodical Conference Proceedings*, 1954. 17-111.

⁸³⁴ *Synodical Conference Proceedings*, 1954. 57-79.

presented the Wisconsin Synod's case against Missouri on most of the remaining issues. Quoting the *Brief Statement*, the *Concordia Cyclopedia*, and even John Behnken on unionism he explained Wisconsin's objections to Missouri's efforts toward establishing fellowship with the ALC, the Joint Communion Agreement with the National Lutheran Council, Missouri's negotiations with top officials of various lodges, and the distinction between joint prayer and prayer fellowship.⁸³⁵ The Missouri essayists, however, were not willing to acknowledge that any of her actions were unionistic.

After hearing the essays a majority in the Synodical Conference passed a resolution requesting that the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod not use the *Common Confession* as a functioning union document without, however, passing judgment pro or con on the doctrinal content of the *Common Confession*. The resolution asking Missouri not to use the *Common Confession* as a functioning document was not an indication of any change in Missouri's position. The *Common Confession* was passing from the scene anyway because the ALC was moving toward union with the other members of the American Lutheran Conference. Thirty delegates from the Norwegian and Wisconsin Synods asked that their negative votes be recorded. An additional twenty-three advisory delegates had their protest recorded.⁸³⁶ An overture presented earlier in the convention asking the Synodical Conference to reject the *Common Confession* because it did not define or safeguard the Scripture doctrine taught in the *Brief Statement* was signed by fifty-one Missouri Synod members.⁸³⁷ Missouri was a house divided.

By 1955 the controversy among the members of the Synodical Conference had come to a head. That year the Norwegian Synod suspended fellowship with the Missouri Synod, but remained in the Synodical Conference and in fellowship with the Wisconsin Synod. Wisconsin's floor committee brought to the convention floor a report whose preamble restated the 1953 declaration and pointed out that this was the kind of situation to which Romans 16:17-18 was

⁸³⁵ *Synodical Conference Proceedings*, 1954. 17-38.

⁸³⁶ *Synodical Conference Proceedings*, 1954. 193-196.

⁸³⁷ *Synodical Conference Proceedings*, 1954. 200-202.

applicable. The resolution stated, “that whereas the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod has created divisions and offenses by its official resolutions, policies, and practices not in accord with Scripture, we, in obedience to the command of our Lord in Romans 16:17-18, terminate our fellowship with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.” The floor committee stated that final action on the resolution was to be taken at a recessed convention in 1956 after Missouri met so that the Missouri might have the opportunity to express itself on Wisconsin’s 1953 admonition. The preamble passed unanimously. The resolution with its proposal of a year’s delay was strongly debated and passed 94-47 (the negative votes cast because of the delay). Twenty-four voting delegates and nineteen advisory delegates recorded their names in protest of the delay. Professor Reim issued a written statement declaring that he could continue in fellowship with his synod only under clear and public protest. He resigned as secretary of the Standing Committee on Church Union and placed his resignation as president and professor of the seminary before the synod and seminary board. The convention gave him a unanimous vote of confidence and asked that the seminary board not accept his resignation. Reim remained as president of the seminary.⁸³⁸

The Missouri Synod convention in 1956 declared that the *Common Confession* would no longer function as a union document (although still viewing it as a statement in harmony with Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions) and gratefully acknowledged the concerns and admonitions that had been addressed to the synod. The Norwegian Synod thanked the Missouri Synod for consideration given to the causes of their suspension of fellowship, but stated that more time was needed to see whether the causes for the suspension of fellowship had been removed. Wisconsin’s 1956 convention resolved to “hold in abeyance” the 1955 resolution to terminate fellowship, but to continue in rigorously protesting fellowship.⁸³⁹ The Synodical Conference met in December. The convention resolved that the Union Committees of the member synods were to

⁸³⁸ *Wisconsin Synod Proceedings*, 1955. 77-88. See also Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, 203-205.

⁸³⁹ *Wisconsin Synod Proceedings*, 1956. 60-61.

meet jointly and draw up a list of problems stating clearly the *status controversiae* of each case; set each synod's view properly expressed in thetical and antithetical form, discuss them throughout the various synods and present their evaluations to the 1958 convention. It also suggested a "conclave of theologians" of overseas brethren to assist in the solution of the unresolved doctrinal problems.⁸⁴⁰

The Joint Union Committee began meeting in January and resolved that Scripture would be the final authority, that there must be a willingness to come to grips with all the issues, to condemn all matters contrary to the Word of God; and (added later) a joint statement must aim at nothing less than full agreement. The problems to be considered were placed into three groups:

1. Atonement, justification, and the dynamic, or motivating power for the Christian life, with practical application to the question of Scouting.
2. Scripture (revelation, principles of interpretation, open questions) and the practical application to the question of fulfillment of biblical prophecy in history, as, for example, in the doctrine of Antichrist.
3. Grace, conversion, election, and church and ministry, with practical application to questions of fellowship, unionism, separatism, church discipline, and the military chaplaincy.⁸⁴¹

The WELS floor committee recommended to the 1957 Wisconsin Synod convention to terminate fellowship. The resolution was defeated 61 ayes to 77 noes. The convention resolved to continue vigorously protesting fellowship and urged a continuation of efforts to restore full unity. Professor Reim resigned from the seminary and terminated his fellowship with the Wisconsin Synod. Two district presidents also terminated fellowship with the synod.⁸⁴²

The Synodical Conference in convention in 1958 received a statement on Scripture.⁸⁴³ It was also reported that a statement on the Antichrist was nearing completion, and that extensive agreement respecting the principles underlying an evaluation of the Scout movement was brought to light. In October the Joint Committee adopted the final form of the statement on Scripture and on the Antichrist.

⁸⁴⁰ *Synodical Conference Proceedings*, 1956. 144-146.

⁸⁴¹ *Synodical Conference Proceedings*, 1958. 41.

⁸⁴² *Wisconsin Synod Proceedings*, 1955. 141-148.

⁸⁴³ *Synodical Conference Proceedings*, 1958. 42-46.

All four constituent synods of the Synodical Conference met in 1959. Missouri, Wisconsin, the ELS, and the Slovak Synod all adopted the statement on Scripture. Wisconsin also adopted the statements on the Antichrist.⁸⁴⁴ Missouri stated that it should not adopt the statement on the Antichrist until the Synodical Conference in convention had the opportunity to discuss it. Missouri devoted much time to the discussion of theological issues but also reaffirmed its 1944 statement on Scouting.

The Conclave of Theologians (from Australia, England, Germany, India, Argentina, Brazil, Canada, and Japan) met in Oakland, California, in 1959. The Conclave met again in Thiensville, Wisconsin, in 1960, but was not able to prevent the break that was soon to be declared.

For several years there had been a trickle of pastors, professors and congregations leaving the Wisconsin and Norwegian Synods. Those who left believed that a break with Missouri was overdue and that the Wisconsin and Norwegian Synods were becoming guilty of Missouri's unionism. In 1960 those pastors and congregations organized the Church of the Lutheran Confession.⁸⁴⁵

The Wisconsin Synod had instructed its theologians on the Joint Committee to continue to work until agreement in doctrine and practice had been attained or until an impasse was reached indicating that no such agreement could be brought about. In May 1960 the Committee declared that such an impasse had been reached on the doctrine of fellowship. The Wisconsin Synod and the ELS produced statements in accord with the historic teaching of the Synodical Conference that no fellowship can be practiced without full doctrinal agreement. In opposition to this "unit concept" of fellowship the Slovak and Missouri Synods maintained a distinction

⁸⁴⁴ *Wisconsin Synod Proceedings*, 1959. 200-205.

⁸⁴⁵ The CLC's Board of Education published a brief (29 pages) history of their synod in 1984. The history is entitled, *This is Your Church: Church of the Lutheran Confession*. The history of the CLC published for the synod's 50th anniversary: David Lau, *Out of Necessity: A History of the Church of the Lutheran Confession*. (Eau Claire, Wisconsin: CLC Board of Education and Publications, 2009). For an overview of the relations between WELS and the CLC see John Brug, *Church Fellowship: Working Together for the Truth*. (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1996), 87-97.

between joint prayer and prayer fellowship and contended for a “growing edge” of fellowship toward those outside their synods. The 1960 Synodical Conference convention had been recessed until May 1961, but could not resolve the impasse on fellowship when the convention reconvened. The Wisconsin Synod in convention, having received the report of the impasse on fellowship, voted to terminate fellowship with the Missouri Synod by a vote of 124-49.⁸⁴⁶

In 1962 both the ELS and the Wisconsin Synod asked the Synodical Conference to dissolve itself. When that did not happen both synods withdrew from Synodical Conference membership in 1963. The Synodical Conference met for the last time in 1966. The next year the Missouri Synod passed resolutions dissolving the Conference and asked the Slovaks to do the same. The Slovak Synod merged with the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod in 1971.⁸⁴⁷

Conclusion

The final phase of the Election Controversy played out from 1938 to 1961. A number of people in the Missouri Synod worked to soften their synod’s image from that of a strict German denomination to that of an America denomination which was open to relations beyond the synods of the Synodical Conference. They tried to improve their synod’s image by softening the synod’s stand on the doctrine of fellowship and the synod’s insistence on full agreement in doctrine and practice. Missouri’s change in the doctrine of fellowship can be seen in the synod’s participation in the military chaplaincy, allowing congregations to participate in the Scouting movement, distinguishing between joint prayer and prayer fellowship, numerous instances of congregations and pastors participating in unionistic services with groups with whom they were not in fellowship, and openness to establishing fellowship with the American Lutheran Church without clearly settling past doctrinal differences. Missouri’s official change in the understanding of

⁸⁴⁶ *Wisconsin Synod Proceedings*, 1961. 197-199. See also pages 168-197.

⁸⁴⁷ The Slovak Evangelical Lutheran Church changed its name to the Synod of Evangelical Lutheran Churches in 1959, In 1971 it became the SELK District of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. *Historical Guide to Lutheran Church Bodies of North America*. 2nd edition, edited by Robert C. Wiederaenders (St. Louis: Lutheran Historical Conference, 1998), 101.

church fellowship resulted in a disregard for the historic differences between the Missouri Synod and the ALC in the doctrines of election, conversion, and open questions.

The issues dating back to the Election Controversy became non-issues for the Missouri Synod while they remained issues for the Wisconsin Synod and the Norwegian Synod. As a result of Missouri's change in the doctrine and practice of fellowship both the Norwegian Synod in 1955 and the Wisconsin Synod in 1961 terminated fellowship Missouri.

CONCLUSION

The roots of the Election Controversy in America stretch back to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the historic characteristics of confessional Lutheranism. Luther's reformation was a *doctrinal* reformation. As a result, his followers have stressed the importance of correct doctrine. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries Lutheranism defined itself doctrinally over against Roman Catholicism, on the one hand, and Calvinism, on the other. In the doctrine of election Lutheranism attempts to steer a course between synergism and the irresistible grace and double predestination of Calvinism.

Confessional Lutherans rejected an approach to theology that relied on quoting church fathers or scholastic reasoning. The source of doctrine is Scripture alone. Luther and the second generation theologians were particularly careful to let Scripture speak and let paradoxes or apparent contradictory teachings stand rather than trying to harmonize them rationally.

Some in the Age of Orthodoxy, reacting to the absolute, double predestination of Calvin, began to use new expressions to explain that the doctrine of election in eternity is carried out in time through the means of grace through which the Holy Spirit leads people to believe and finally be saved. The expression they used, however, was prone to being misunderstood. They spoke of election *intuitu fidei*, election in view of faith. Some suggested that faith was a cause of election.

When the Missouri Synod theologian C.F.W. Walther presented an essay on the doctrine of election in which he said that the expression election *intuitu fidei* should be avoided, Friedrich Schmidt and others accused him of false teaching. Schmidt insisted on using the manner of teaching and the terminology of the theologians of the Age of Orthodoxy to explain the doctrine of election. In so doing Schmidt and those who agreed with him placed a stress on human reason for unfolding the mysteries of the Bible instead of allowing paradoxes to stand. They tried to peer into the hidden will of God. This approach led them to couch a synergistic understanding of the doctrine of conversion behind the expression, election *intuitu fidei*.

The controversy over election became bitter because each side believed that they were contending for God's truth. Both sides recognized the importance of doctrine and doctrinal agreement for the expression of Christian fellowship and unity. The Ohio Synod left the Synodical Conference as a result of the controversy. The Norwegian Synod also left because one third of the Norwegian Synod pastors were making propaganda for election *intuitu fidei* and were accusing the other members of the Synodical Conference of error. The Norwegian Synod believed that they might better be able to deal with the discord if they left the Synodical Conference. Although no longer a member of the Synodical Conference, the synod remained in fellowship with the other synods that were members. Eventually the Norwegian Synod lost one third of her pastors and congregations. Those who left formed the Anti-Missouri Brotherhood.

A difference in approach to the theological task became evident during the free conferences of the first decade of the twentieth century. The Missouri, Wisconsin, and Minnesota synods saw the theological task as one in which the theologian was to study all the passages of Scripture that teach a particular doctrine in order to draw that teaching from Scripture. They did not believe that it was the theologian's task to try to harmonize clearly revealed teachings of Scripture when those teachings appeared to be in conflict. They were willing to let the paradoxes stand. They saw God's revelation and the doctrines of Scripture as super-rational, above human ability to harmonize in a way that was satisfying to human reason. There are many things which God has not chosen to reveal or explain to people. Humans cannot peer into the hidden will of God but must look only at his will revealed in the Holy Scriptures. The theologian must let God be God and not place his rational ability above the Holy Scriptures.

The Ohio and Iowa synods believed that the theological task involved developing a harmonious system of all the teachings of Scripture. They claimed that this could be done through the analogy of faith by which one doctrine could be made to agree with another according to human reason. They tried to solve the question of why some are chosen by God by using the doctrine of justification by faith as an explanation of the mystery of election. They also

used the term *Schriftganze* (the aggregate or entirety of Scripture) to express their belief that all of Scripture must be used to understand each particular doctrine of Scripture and that every doctrine must fit in with all of Scripture as perceived by human wisdom and the use of human reason.

This difference in approach to theology doomed the free conferences. No resolution of the Election Controversy could be reached because the participants in the conferences disagreed on how doctrine was to be drawn from Scripture.

In spite of historic doctrinal differences various Norwegian groups came together on the basis of a doctrinal compromise known as the Madison Settlement or *Opgjør*. The settlement allowed both ways of teaching election to have equal standing. They agreed to disagree. They lost sight of the historic Lutheran concern for doctrine and the necessity of doctrinal unity before fellowship could be expressed or mergers could be entered. There were a number of contributing factors to this departure from confessional Lutheran standards: ethnic pride, weariness of fighting over doctrine particularly among the laity, the process of Americanization, the intersynodical production of worship materials in English, and the ecumenical spirit of the times that favored outward unity without regard to doctrinal agreement. One small Norwegian group refused to participate in the Norwegian merger and formed a new synod that rejoined the Synodical Conference.

Many Midwestern Lutherans still longed to resolve the controversy in order to keep synods from competing with each other in certain geographical areas and because they recognized that there was a time when they were in fellowship. A group of pastors in Sibley County, Minnesota, tried to celebrate the four hundredth anniversary of the posting of Luther's Ninety-five Theses by bringing about a resolution of the Election Controversy. These pastors set the Intersynodical Movement in motion. The Movement eventually produced the Chicago (Intersynodical) Theses which appeared to many to have resolved the controversy. This effort failed when the Missouri Synod rejected the theses because the theses did not rule out a false understanding of the contested doctrines. It had become apparent that the Ohio and Iowa synod

representatives were trying to agree with the synods of the Synodical Conference while at the same time they were entering into fellowship arrangements with Scandinavian synods that either regarded the Synodical Conference teaching as erroneous or were willing to agree to disagree on doctrine. The doctrine of fellowship and the Lutheran understanding of the importance of doctrine and agreement in doctrine for the expression of fellowship became the underlying reason that the Intersynodical Movement failed to unite the various synods.

The final phase of the Election Controversy played out in the mid twentieth century. The Missouri Synod attempted to establish fellowship with the newly-formed American Lutheran Church. This new synod was formed by a merger of synods that had historically opposed the Missouri Synod in the doctrines of election and conversion. The ALC was also a member of the American Lutheran Conference, practicing fellowship with Scandinavian synods that were opposed to the position of the Missouri Synod.

Some in the Missouri Synod were trying to soften the image of the synod and to make it appear more American. They succeeded in moving their synod from a position which demanded doctrinal agreement to a position of willingness to overlook some differences for the sake of outward union. Although the Missouri Synod did produce some confessional statements (e.g., Doctrinal Affirmation and the Common Confession) which they believed had resolved the historic controversies, these documents were rejected by the Wisconsin Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod for not clearly ruling out the historic errors of the ALC. Once again the doctrine of fellowship and the historic Lutheran confessional understanding of the importance of doctrine and agreement in doctrine for the expression of fellowship became the driving issues which resulted in the Wisconsin Synod and the ELS breaking fellowship with the Missouri Synod. Failure to truly resolve the doctrinal differences of the Election Controversy resulted in another division in American Lutheranism.

Today the synods which historically had been opposed to the doctrine of election and conversion as taught in the Synodical Conference have become members of the Evangelical

Lutheran Church in America, the largest and most liberal of the Lutheran synods. The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod is the second largest Lutheran synod in America and occupies a position between the ELCA and the Wisconsin Synod and Evangelical Lutheran Synod. The official doctrinal position of the Missouri Synod remains closer to the Wisconsin Synod and the ELS than to the ELCA. But disagreements on the doctrine and practice of church fellowship remain.

Appendix A

Lutheran Federations⁸⁴⁸

I. General Synod (General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States of America) – 1820-1918

- A. Founded in 1820
- B. Doctrinal position – confessional ambiguity; there was no mention of any of the Lutheran Confessions (not even the *Augsburg Confession*) in the original constitution.
- C. Periodicals
 - Evangelical Review*, 1849-1871
 - Lutheran Quarterly*, 1871-1928
 - Lutheran Observer*, 1832-1915
 - Lutheran Church Work and Observer*, 1915-1918
 - Lutherischer Zionsbote*, 1897-1918
- D. In 1918 the General Synod merged with the General Council and the United Synod, South to form the United Lutheran Church in America (ULCA).

II. General Synod, South (General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Confederate States, 1863-1866; Evangelical Lutheran General Synod in North America, 1866-1876; Evangelical Lutheran General Synod South, 1876-1886; United Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the South, 1886-1918)

- A. Founded in 1863 by six southern synods which left the General Synod during the Civil War.
- B. Doctrinal position – made an attempt to be more confessional than the General Synod, but had no interest in the “exclusive Lutheranism of the Formula of Concord” or of the so-called “Old Lutherans.”
- C. In 1918 this group merged with the General Synod and the General Council to form the United Lutheran Church in America (ULCA).

III. General Council (General Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1867-1876; General Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in North America, 1876-1918)

- A. Founded in 1867
- B. Doctrinal position – the General Council was founded as a confessional reaction to the General Synod. The General Council however did not put its confessional stance into practice. It never was able to come to grips with the scriptural principles of church fellowship. Eventually liberalism dominated.
- C. Periodicals
 - Lutheran*, 1882-1918
 - Lutheran and Missionary*, 1861-1882
- D. In 1918 merged with the General Synod and the United Synod, South to form the United Lutheran Church in America (ULCA).

⁸⁴⁸ A federation is an organization of various synods that exists for mutual encouragement and to carry out activities of mutual interest. Most of the information in this appendix has been gleaned from the *Historical Guide to the Lutheran Church Bodies of North America*, Robwert C. Wiederaenders, ed. Lutheran Historical Conference Publication No. 1 (St. Louis: Lutheran Historical Conference, 1988).

IV. Synodical Conference (Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America) – 1872-1967

- A. Founded in 1872
- B. Doctrinal position – Attempted to promote true confessionalism among Lutherans in America. The Synodical Conference became the leading voice of confessional Lutheranism in America for nearly 100 years. It carried out joint home and foreign mission work and educational endeavors.
- C. Disbanded in 1967 after the Wisconsin Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod withdrew in 1963.

V. Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan, and Other States – 1892-1917

- A. Founded in 1892 as a cooperative organization of the Wisconsin, Michigan, and Minnesota synods to more efficiently carry out ministerial education, mission work, and publications.
- B. Doctrinal position – the same as that of the Synodical Conference
- C. Periodicals
 - Gemeinde-Blatt*, 1865-1969 (Wisconsin Synod)
 - Theologische Quartalschrift* (today – *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*) 1904- (Wis. Synod)
 - Synodal Freund*, 1888-1910 (Michigan Synod)
 - Northwestern Lutheran* (today – *Forward in Christ*), 1914- (Wis. Synod)
- D. In 1917 the three synods together with the Nebraska Synod (joined in 1904) merged to form Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan, and Other States. Wisconsin Synod historians refer to the former as the Wisconsin Federation and the latter as the Wisconsin Synod. In 1959 the synod's name was changed to the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

VI. National Lutheran Council – 1918-1966

- A. In 1918 the National Lutheran Council was founded to promote joint work among Lutherans serving in the armed forces and to speak with a united voice on issues of the day. Participants included ULCA, Norwegian Lutheran Church, Augustana Synod, Lutheran Free Church, United Danish Lutheran Church, Danish Lutheran Church in America, Icelandic Synod, Ohio Synod, Iowa Synod, and Buffalo Synod.
- B. Doctrinal position – ecumenical Lutheran
- C. Periodical
 - National Lutheran*, 1931-1966
- D. In 1966 the NLC disbanded and turned most of its functions over to the Lutheran Council in the United States of America

VII. American Lutheran Conference – 1930-1954

- A. Founded in 1930 by the American Lutheran Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, Augustana Synod, Lutheran Free Church, and the United Evangelical Lutheran Church. All of these were members of the National Lutheran Council along with the United Lutheran Church in America. The five, however, were suspicious of the ULCA's size, power, and theological liberalism.
- B. Doctrinal position – moderate Lutheran
- C. Periodicals
 - Journal of the American Lutheran Conference*, 1936-1940

Journal of Theology of the American Lutheran Conference, 1940-1943
Lutheran Outlook, 1943-1953

- D. The American Lutheran Conference disbanded in 1954. In 1960 its members merged to form the American Lutheran Church. The Augustana Synod declined to merged, but became a charter member of the Lutheran Church in America (LCA) in 1962.

VIII. Lutheran Council in the United States of America – 1966-1987

- A. Founded in 1966 as an outgrowth of meetings involving representatives of the American Lutheran Church, the Lutheran Church in America, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, and the Slovak Evangelical Lutheran Church. Formal operations began on January 1, 1967.
- B. Doctrinal position – ecumenical Lutheran
- C. Periodical
Interchange, 1967-
- D. Disbanded in 1987 because of the organization of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). The ELCA was formed by a merger of the Lutheran Church in America, the American Lutheran Church, and the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches in 1988.

Appendix B

Synodical Conference Membership

Year	Members	Reason for gain/loss
1872	Ohio Synod, Missouri Synod, Illinois Synod, Minnesota Synod, Norwegian Synod, Wisconsin Synod	Charter Members
1875	Ohio Synod, Missouri Synod, Minnesota Synod, Norwegian Synod, Wisconsin Synod	Illinois Synod merged with the Missouri Synod
1882	Missouri Synod, Minnesota Synod, Norwegian Synod, Wisconsin Synod, Concordia Synod	Ohio Synod left because of the Election Controversy. Concordia Synod joined.
1883	Missouri Synod, Minnesota Synod, Wisconsin Synod, Concordia Synod	Norwegian Synod withdrew to deal with Election Controversy problems in her midst but remained in fellowship with the synods of the Synodical Conference
1886	Missouri Synod, Minnesota Synod, Wisconsin Synod	Concordia Synod merged with the Missouri Synod
1890	Missouri Synod, Minnesota Synod, Wisconsin Synod, English Synod of Missouri	English Synod of Missouri joined
1892	Missouri Synod, Minnesota Synod, Wisconsin Synod, English Synod of Missouri, Michigan Synod	Michigan Synod joined.
1896	Missouri Synod, Minnesota Synod, Wisconsin Synod, English Synod of Missouri, Michigan District Synod	The Michigan Synod left the Synodical Conference but a remnant remained as the Michigan District Synod.
1908	Missouri Synod, Minnesota Synod, Wisconsin Synod, English Synod of Missouri, Michigan District Synod, Nebraska Synod, Slovak Synod	The Nebraska Synod and the Slovak Synod joined.
1911	Missouri Synod, Minnesota Synod, Wisconsin Synod, Michigan Synod, Nebraska Synod, Slovak Synod	The English Synod of Missouri merged with the Missouri Synod. The Michigan Synod and Michigan District Synod reunited in 1910.
1917	Missouri Synod, Wisconsin Synod, Slovak Synod	The Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan and Nebraska synods merged to form the Wisconsin Synod.
1920	Missouri Synod, Wisconsin Synod, Slovak Synod, Norwegian Synod	The Norwegian Synod left the Norwegian Church to form the Norwegian Synod in 1918 and joined the SC in 1920.
1963	Missouri Synod, Slovak Synod	The Wisconsin & Norwegian synods left the Synodical Conference because of differences on the doctrine & practice of fellowship

Appendix C

Scandinavian Lutheran Synods in America

I. The Norwegian Lutherans

- A. The **Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (Eielsen Synod)** was established at Jefferson Prairie, Wisconsin, in April 1846 by Elling Eielsen (1804-1883), a revivalistic lay preacher.
- B. **Hauge's Synod** broke off from the Eielsen Synod in 1875/76.
- C. **Norwegian Ev. Lutheran Church in America (Norwegian Synod)** was founded in 1853. This was a confessional Lutheran synod led by Herman Amberg Preus. From 1857 until establishing own seminary in 1876 the Norwegian Synod's pastors were trained at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. The Norwegians supplied a professor. The Norwegian Synod was a founding member of the Synodical Conference. The ELS split off from this Synod in 1917 (1918).
- D. **Norwegian-Danish Augustana Synod in America** (Norwegian Augustana Synod) peacefully split off from the Scandinavian Ev. Lutheran Augustana Synod in 1870. Constitution specified the whole Book of Concord as its doctrinal basis.
- E. **The Conference for the Norwegian-Danish Ev. Lutheran Church in America** peacefully split off from the Scandinavian Ev. Lutheran Augustana Synod in 1870. It specified only the 3 ecumenical creeds, the Unaltered Augsburg Confession and Luther's Small Catechism as its doctrinal basis.
- F. **Anti-Missouri Brotherhood** broke off from the Norwegian Synod in 1887 as a result of the Election Controversy.
- G. **United Norwegian Lutheran Church in America** was formed in 1890 by the merger of the Anti-Missouri Brotherhood, Norwegian-Danish Augustana Synod in America, and The Conference for the Norwegian-Danish Ev. Lutheran Church in America.
- H. **Lutheran Free Church** was organized in 1897 by congregations leaving the United Norwegian Lutheran Church over disagreements in union agreements, and new trends in theological thinking, congregational life, and seminary training.
- I. **Church of the Lutheran Brethren** was founded by five Norwegian Lutheran congregations in Milwaukee in 1900. These Norwegians were influenced by a revival that swept through Norwegian settlements in the 1890s. The Brethren emphasize conversion experience, non-liturgical worship, lay activity, and mission work.
- J. **Norwegian Lutheran Church in America (later - Evangelical Lutheran Church or ELC)** was formed in 1917 by the merger of the Norwegian Synod, the United Norwegian Lutheran Church in America, and the Hauge's Synod. The document which allowed the United Church and the Norwegian Synod to join in spite of past differences on the doctrines of election and conversion was the Madison Settlement or *Opgjør*.
- K. **The Norwegian Synod of the American Ev. Lutheran Church (today - Evangelical Lutheran Synod or ELS)** was founded in 1918 by thirteen pastors and a number of congregations which refused to go along with the 1917 merger of the United Church, the Norwegian Synod, and the Hauge's Synod because they did not believe that the *Opgjør* had adequately settled previous doctrinal disputes.

II. The Swedish Lutherans

- A. The first Swedish Lutheran Congregations joined the **Ev. Lutheran Synod of Northern Illinois** which was composed of four different national groups: Americans, Germans, Norwegians and Swedes.
- B. **The Scandinavian Ev. Lutheran Augustana Synod in North America** was founded at Jefferson Prairie, Wisconsin, in 1860 when friction developed between the “New Lutherans” in the Northern Illinois Synod and the more conservative Scandinavian element. It was pledged to the entire Book of Concord. The Augustana Synod’s seminary was established in Chicago in 1860. The Norwegian-Danish Augustana Synod in America (Norwegian Augustana Synod) peacefully split off from the Scandinavian Ev. Lutheran Augustana Synod in 1870. The Conference for the Norwegian-Danish Ev. Lutheran Church in America also peacefully split off from the Scandinavian Ev. Lutheran Augustana Synod in 1870

III. The Danish Lutherans

- A. **The Danish Ev. Lutheran Church in America** was formed in 1872 as “The Missionary Association of the Church.” The name was changed in 1878. The constitution was Grundtvigian and not orthodox Lutheran.
- B. **The Danish Ev. Lutheran Church in North America** was founded in 1894 by 22 pastors and their congregations who were expelled from the Danish Ev. Lutheran Church in America for not subscribing to the constitution with its Grundtvigian theology.
- C. **The United Danish Ev. Lutheran Church in America** was organized in the fall of 1896. It was a union of the Danish Ev. Lutheran Church in North America and the Danish element which broke off from the Norwegian-Danish Conference.

Appendix D
Main Participants in the Election Controversy
in the Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries

Synodical Conference Position

Synod	Main Spokesmen	Periodicals/Theological Journals
Missouri Synod (founded 1847)	C.F.W. Walther George Stoeckhardt Franz (Francis) Pieper Friedrich Bente Theodore Graebner	<i>Der Lutheraner</i> <i>Lehre und Wehre</i> <i>Lutheran Witness</i>
Wisconsin Synod (1850)	Adolf Hoenecke John Bading August Pieper J.P. Koehler John P. Meyer	<i>Gemeinde-Blatt</i> <i>Theologische Quartalschrift</i> <i>The Northwestern Lutheran</i>
Norwegian Ev. Lutheran Church in America [aka, Synod for the Norwegian Ev. Lutheran Church in America; Norwegian Synod] (1853)	Ulrik Koren Herman Amberg Preus Jakob A. Ottesen Hans Stub	<i>Kirkelig Maanedstidende</i> <i>Evangelisk-luthersk Kirketidende</i> <i>Lutheran Herald</i>
Norwegian Synod of the American Ev. Lutheran Church [aka, Little Norwegian Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Synod] (1918)	S.C. Ylvisaker Bjug Harstad	<i>Evangelical Lutheranersk Tidende</i> <i>The Lutheran Sentinel</i>

Election *Intuitu Fidei* Position

Ohio Synod (founded 1818)	Matthias Loy Henry Allwardt Frederick Stellhorn John Klindworth C. C. Hein	<i>Lutheran Standard</i> <i>Lutherische Kirchenzeitung</i> <i>Theologische Zeitblaetter</i> <i>Columbus Theological Magazine</i> <i>Pastors' Monthly</i>
Buffalo Synod [aka, Synod of the Lutheran Church emigrated from Prussia, Lutheran Synod of Buffalo] (1845)		<i>Kirchliches Informatorium</i> <i>Wachende Kirche</i> <i>Forward</i>
Iowa Synod (1853)	Sigmund Fritschel Gottfried Fritschel J. Michael Reu	<i>Kirchenblatt</i> <i>Kirchliche Zeitschrift</i> <i>Lutheran Herald</i>
Anti-Missourian Brotherhood (1887)	Friedrich Schmidt	<i>Lutherske Vidnesbyrd</i>
United Norwegian Lutheran Church in America (1890)	Friedrich Schmidt J. N. Kildahl	<i>Luthersk Kirkblad</i> <i>Samfundet Lutheranen</i> <i>The United Lutheran</i>

Norwegian Lutheran Church of America [Evangelical Lutheran Church] (1917)	Hans Stub	<i>Lutheranen</i> <i>Lutheran Church Herald</i>
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Appendix E

Major Lutheran Mergers

I. United Lutheran Church in America (ULCA)

- A. Participants -- General Synod, General Council, United Synod, South
- B. Year -- 1918
- C. Significance -- union of all of Eastern Lutherans, 1st step toward LCA and today's ELCA

II. United Norwegian Lutheran Church in America

- A. Participants -- The Norwegian-Danish Augustana Synod, The Norwegian Danish Conference, The Anti-Missouri Brotherhood
- B. Year -- 1890
- C. Significance -- 1st step toward pan-Norwegian union
- D. Splinter Groups -- Lutheran Free Church (1897); Church of the Lutheran Brethren (1900).

III. Norwegian Lutheran Church in America (Evangelical Lutheran Church)

- A. Participants -- United Norwegian Church in America, Norwegian Synod, Hauge Synod
- B. Year -- 1917
- C. Basis -- Madison Settlement, 1912, compromise agreement allowing 2 forms of doctrine of election so long as Calvinism and synergism are avoided
- D. Significance -- United 92% of Norwegian Lutherans in America
- E. Splinter Group -- The Norwegian Synod of the American Ev. Lutheran Church (Evangelical Lutheran Synod) 1918

IV. Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

- A. Participants -- Wisconsin Synod, Minnesota Synod, Michigan Synod, and Nebraska Synod
- B. Year -- 1917
- C. Basis -- the synods had been in fellowship for many years and had cooperated in the federation known as the Ev. Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan, and Other States.
- D. Significance -- allowed four relatively small confessional Lutheran Synods to pool their resources and carry out their work more efficiently. Today the Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod is the 4th largest Lutheran Synod in America.
- E. Splinter Groups -- in the late 1920s and early 1930s the Protes'tant Conference was formed. In 1960 the Church of the Lutheran Confessions was formed by pastors and congregations that left the Wisconsin Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (the little Norwegian Synod).

V. American Lutheran Church

- A. Participants -- Ohio Synod, Iowa Synod, Buffalo Synod
- B. Year -- 1930
- C. Basis -- Toledo Theses (1918) and the Minneapolis Theses (1925)

- D. Significance – Brought together Lutheran synods representing a “middle” doctrinal position between the synods of the Synodical Conference and the ULCA.

VI. American Lutheran Church

- A. Participants – the American Lutheran Church (1930), the Evangelical Lutheran Church, and the United Evangelical Lutheran Church. The Lutheran Free Church joined in 1963.
- B. Date – 1960
- C. Basis – “United Testimony on Faith and Life” (1952)
- D. Significance – Brought together synods with diverse national backgrounds (German, Norwegian and Danish) demonstrating the Americanization of these groups.

VII. Lutheran Church in America

- A. Participants – United Lutheran Church in America, Augustana Synod, American Ev. Lutheran Church, and the Suomi Ev. Lutheran Synod
- B. Date – 1962
- C. Basis – 1956 Joint Commission on Lutheran Unity was organized. They find “sufficient agreement in the common confessions...to justify seeking organic union.”
- D. Significance – Gathered in one synod the most liberal Lutheran synods in America. The doctrinal position of the LCA is a direct forerunner of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Appendix F Theses

The Sibley County Theses

Preliminary Theses adopted in Gaylord⁸⁴⁹

1. The conversion of a human being is solely a work of God the Holy Spirit.
2. The origin of the salvation of a human being is solely God's grace and Christ's merit. The origin of damnation is solely the human being's guilt and sins. We must permit both of these teachings, clearly maintained in Scripture, to stand alongside each other, without making [any] attempt to make them tally according to human reason and logic.
3. Faith is the means of salvation given by God. It leads into error to say that faith is a [pre]condition of salvation. If faith were a condition, which people had to fulfill, thus it would follow from that, that the human being had the power to fulfill the condition, [and] thus [had the power] to believe based on his own decision. Against this, we confess in the third article [of the Creed in the Small Catechism]: I believe, that I do not believe in Jesus Christ by my own reason or power, etc. If one says that faith is the God-given means to salvation, then the "only by grace" remains unassailed.

Final Theses adopted at Winthrop⁸⁵⁰

The Sibley County pastors of the Synodical Conference and of the Ohio Synod held conferences on July 12 and 28 in Gaylord and on August 25 [1915] in Winthrop, in order to articulate our doctrine and practice to one another. It was agreed in advance to avoid discussion of historical matters. Next, the doctrine of conversion was taken up for discussion.

1. We acknowledge unanimously and without reservation the doctrine of the election of grace as it is set forth in the eleventh article of the Formula of Concord.
2. Since both [*sic*] conferring church bodies recognize that Art. 11 of the Formula of Concord contains the pure and right doctrine of the Word of God and of the Lutheran Church about the election of the children of God to salvation, therefore they see it as unnecessary to church unity to set up new and more extensive doctrinal statements about this article of faith.

Point 3 was deleted. There was a long dispute about the phraseology according to which God has elected in view of faith. It was expressed like this: This formula has been taken up by the Church in the struggle with Calvinism. With this expression it ought to be said that the stubbornly believing are the elect, and a rationalizing explanation ought not be given [as to] why some are saved instead of others. This phraseology is not found in the Holy Scriptures or in the Lutheran confessions. It leads easily to the erring proposition, that in the human being there is an origin of the election of grace. One ought therefore to avoid this phraseology.

4. Since during the church controversy among us, expressions and words have come to the fore-with justice or injustice attributed to the contending parties-which to the other [party] appeared as though they were a denial of the confession or as leading to that, thus we have united ourselves to cast aside all erroristic statements which attempt to explain further the secret of the election of grace-F. of Concord, [S. D.,] Art. 11, sets. 52-64-

⁸⁴⁹ *Synodal-Bericht. Verhandlung der Zweite Versammlung des Minnesota-Distrikts der Allgemeine Synode von Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan, und andere Staaten. Gehalten in der Evang.-Luth. Immannuels-Kirche zu Mankato, Minneosta vom 24-30, Juni, 1920.* (Milwaukee, Northwestern Publishing House 1920), 29-30. Unpublished English translation by Pastor John Weaver-Hudson.

⁸⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 30-34.

whether [such explanation] is in a synergistic or Calvinistic fashion, inasmuch as [such explanations either rob God of His honor as the unique Savior, on the one side, or, on the other side, want to diminish the guilt of a human being in rejecting grace.

5. On the one hand, we reject:
 - a. the doctrine that the compassion of God and Christ's merit are not alone the origins of our election, but rather that an[other] origin of it is also available, through which God is impelled to elect us to eternal life.
 - b. the doctrine that in election God is constrained or has paid attention to or has directed Himself according to the good disposition of a human being or anything .that the human being is, does, or permits from himself or from his own natural powers.
 - c. the doctrine that the faith in Christ which is indissolubly bound up with election is brought to bear in advance or rests upon the human being's own decision, power or inclination, either entirely or in part (comp. F. of Concord, Art. 2, sees. 52 and 61) [[900, 904];
 - d. or that this faith is the result of a capacity of power to make one's decision for grace, imparted through the call of grace and indwelling or congenital on the part of the unrebored human being.
6. On the other hand, we reject:
 - a. the doctrine that God in the election of grace conducts Himself arbitrarily or randomly, since he designates a fixed, arbitrary quota of some individuals or other, picks them out, and appoints them to conversion and saving, with skipping over all the others;
 - b. the doctrine, that two distinct wills of grace exist in God, one, which is revealed in Scripture in the general *ordo salutis*, and one, which is distinct from [the first] and unknown to us, which pertains only to the elect and furnishes them an inward love and more powerful call from God, a greater grace than [God gives] to the one who remains in his unbelief and ruin;
 - c. the doctrine that when the resistance, which God takes away at conversion from those who are to be saved, is not taken away from the others who are lost, this has its basis in God and in a divided will to save in His election;
 - d. the doctrine that the believing person can and must have an absolute certainty of his election and salvation, instead of a certainty of faith, created out of God's promise; Note-This certainty of faith does not exclude, on account of the sinful flesh, the creation of salvation with fear and trembling, and the warning against falling away.
 - e. In sum, all viewpoints and teachings about election, which directly or indirectly come into conflict with Scripture and do not want to give an equally great opportunity of salvation or in any way restrict the Word of God, which says that God wants all human beings to be helped and to come to the knowledge of the truth, in which gracious and compassionate will on God's part, all election to eternal life has its origin. It should be noted at "equally great opportunity" that it is not thereby excluded, that God often permits a greater portion of grace to be given to one person than to some others, as it proceeds from the word of the Savior: Were such deeds done at Tyre and Sidon as have been done among you, they would have repented in sackcloth and ashes some time ago. And it happens not rarely that a human being to whom much greater grace is imparted than to many others,

nonetheless is lost, while many others, who have received less grace,
are still saved.

Arlington, Sibley Co., Minn.,
15 September 1915

"St. Paul Theses"⁸⁵¹

Guiding Statements, which were adopted at the intersynodical conference in the Evangelical-Lutheran Trinity Church at St. Paul, Minnesota on 3 and 4 May 1916.

Prefatory note: An advance agreement was attained to stay away from historical matters in the discussion. Next, the doctrine of conversion was taken up for discussion.

1. The conversion of a human being is solely the work of God the Holy Spirit.
2. The origin of the salvation of a human being is solely God's grace and Christ's merit. The origin of damnation is solely the human being's guilt and sins, namely his unbelief. We must permit both of these teachings, clearly maintained in Scripture, to stand alongside each other, and believe them. In regard to the question whence it arises, that under the same grace and in the same guilt, one contingent of humanity is converted and is saved, and the other [contingent] not, we stand before a secret, which is utterly impossible and also unnecessary for us human beings to explain satisfactorily.
3. We recognize unanimously and without reservation the doctrine of the election of grace, as it is presented in Article 11 of the formula of Concord.
4. Since the participants in the conference recognize, that Article 11 of the Formula of Concord contains the pure and right doctrine of the Word of God and of the Lutheran Church concerning the election of the children of God to salvation, thus [the participants] regard it as unnecessary to church unity to set up new and more extensive doctrinal statements about this article of faith. Since according to Article 11 of the Formula of Concord, God's gracious foreseeing or election of the children of God consists in this, that the eternal God, on the basis of Christ's redemption which embraces the whole human race, already before the foundation of the world-out of grace for Christ's sake-has foreseen, foreordained, and elected all those, whom He calls out of grace for Christ's sake through the Gospel, brings to faith, and sanctifies, preserves, and eternally saves in the true faith.

Note A: The phraseology that God saves one instead of another, or, that He has elected one instead of another [human being], is found neither in Holy Scripture nor in the Lutheran confessions. This phraseology easily leads in its literal sense to the erroristic notion, either that God's grace in Christ does not extend at all over a great contingent of human beings, or at any rate not in the same measure as over others. Consequently, one ought to avoid this phraseology.

Note B: The phraseology that God has elected in view of faith, is found neither in Holy Scripture nor in the Lutheran confessions. In its literal sense [*Wortlaut*] this expression easily leads to the erroristic notion, that the foreseen faith is an origin of the gracious election of God. Consequently, one ought to avoid this phraseology.

5. On the one hand, we reject:
 - a. the doctrine, that the compassion of God and Christ's merit are not alone the origins of our election, but rather that another] origin of it is also available, through which God is impelled to elect us to eternal life.
 - b. the doctrine that in election God is constrained or has paid attention to or has directed Himself according to the good disposition of a human being or anything

⁸⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 35-37.

that the human being is, does, or permits from himself or from his own natural powers.

- c. the doctrine that the faith in Christ which is indissolubly bound up with election is brought to bear in advance or rests upon the human being's own decision, power, or inclination (comp. Formula of Concord, Art. 2, sees. 35 and 44) 1894-61;
 - d. the doctrine that this faith is the result of an indwelling or inherent inclination or power of the human being imparted through the call of grace, [which] decides for grace.
6. On the other hand, we reject:
- a. the doctrine that God in the election of grace conducts Himself arbitrarily or randomly, since He designated a fixed, arbitrary quota of some individuals or other, picks them out, and appoints them to conversion and saving, with skipping over all the others;
 - b. the doctrine, that two distinct wills of grace exist in God, one, which is revealed in Scripture in the general *ordo salutis*, and one, which is distinct from [the first] and unknown to us, which pertains only to the elect and furnishes them an inward love and more powerful call from God, a greater grace than [God gives] to the one who remains in his unbelief and ruin;
 - c. the doctrine that when the resistance, which God takes away at conversion from those who are to be saved, is not taken away from the others who are lost, this has its basis in God and in a divided will to save in His election;
 - d. the doctrine that the believing person can and must have an absolute certainty of his election and salvation, instead of a certainty of faith, created out of God's promise; Note: This certainty of faith does not exclude, on account of the sinful flesh, the creation of salvation with fear and trembling, and the warning against falling away.
 - e. In sum: all viewpoints and teachings about election, which directly or indirectly come into conflict with Scripture and do not want to give a complete opportunity of salvation, or in any way restrict the Word of God, which says that God wants all human beings to be helped and to come to the knowledge of the truth, in which gracious and compassionate will on God's part, all election to eternal life has its origin.

CHICAGO (INTERSYNODICAL) THESES⁸⁵²

[Notice. Herewith we lay before our respective synods the final result of many years of labor on the part of the so-called Intersynodical Committee. The text herewith presented offers the Chicago Theses in the form definitely approved by the Committee, as they were adopted after careful revision at St. Paul, Minn., on **August 2, 1928**. For the purpose of clearly stating their understanding of the Theses, two representatives of the Venerable Synod of Ohio have added a separate explanation to these Theses. Since the printing of the Theses always involved the Committee in special difficulties, a resolution was passed to release the Theses for publication by the synods. Hence any synod cooperating in this endeavor has the right to publish these Theses in the version herewith submitted. It was decided that the German text herewith presented be the official text of the Theses for Union. An English version is to be prepared by a committee charged with this task, and is to be published as by authority of this committee. However, in case of possible differences of interpretation the German text is to remain the deciding text. In the name and by order of the Committee, A. C. Haase, Secretary. St. Paul, Minn., August 22, 1928.]

Brief Presentation of the Doctrine of Conversion and Election.

Without reservation we pledge our adherence to the doctrine of the Lutheran Church regarding conversion and election of grace, as presented on the basis of Scripture in the Confessional Writings of our Church.

This doctrine, briefly stated, is as follows

1) Holy Scripture teaches that through original sin man is by nature in such a state of corruption that, on the one hand, he lacks all power and ability unto anything that is good in a spiritual respect, and, on the other hand, he is filled with a desire for and inclination to everything that is evil.

2) Prompted by His mercy and unmerited grace, God in His love has taken up the cause of the lost and condemned human race, and has prepared salvation in Christ for all without exception. He is not willing that any should perish, but that all men should be converted to Him.

3) To this end He causes His eternal, divine Law and the saving Gospel of Christ, the Savior of sinners, to be preached in all the world.

4) The preaching of God's Word is the means and instrument by which God proposes to work effectually in all and to save all. If God is to do His work in man, man must hear the Word. (Baptism and the Lord's Supper are included in the Word; they are "the Word made visible.")

5) By the Word God works in them that hear the Word. By the preaching of the Law He crushes our hearts and thus leads us to know our sin and the anger of God and to experience in heart a genuine terror, contrition, and sorrow. By the preaching of the holy Gospel concerning the gracious forgiveness of our sins in Christ He draws us in such a manner that a spark of faith is kindled in us. (F. C. 601, 54; Triglotta 903.)

6) This work of conversion, according to the teaching of Scripture, is entirely and exclusively God's work. Man can in no wise make himself worthy of it, prepare himself for it, nor, in general, conduct himself in such a manner that it would be because of man's conduct that God performs His work in him. True, natural man can make an external use of the Word of God by hearing and reading it. (F. C. 594, 24; 601, 53; Triglotta 891 and 901.) However, he can in no wise contribute anything toward his conversion but, as much as in him lies, can only frustrate this work of God in him.

⁸⁵² "The Chicago Theses." *Theologische Quartalschrift*, vol. 26, no.4 (October 1929), 250-273.

7) True, even in the converted person there remains a certain resistance because original sin is not eradicated until death, but in the heart of the believer the Holy Ghost, by His power, has brought forth a new life which daily overcomes this resistance.

8) The sinners failure to be converted and saved is in no wise due to God, but is entirely the fault of man, who either does not hear God's Word or, having heard it, puts it out of his mind, despises it, closes his ear and hardens his heart against it, and in this manner blocks the way to the Holy Spirit. A person who in this manner resists the Holy Spirit continually and persistently, and who forever rejects the grace of God wilfully, is not converted and perishes by his own fault.

9) Accordingly, every true Christian confesses: "I believe, that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith." He will also "on the last day raise up me and all the dead and give to me and all that believe in Christ eternal life."

10) Even in eternity every detail that pertains to all that the Holy Spirit has done, is doing, and will yet do, in me and all believers has been considered and ordained by God out of grace alone for Christ's sake, so that our salvation rests entirely in His faithful hands and whatever may befall us must work together for our good.

11) This eternal counsel of God regarding His children, revealed to us in His Word particularly for strengthening our faith in times of trouble and tribulation, we call, in accordance with the Scriptures and our Confessions, "God's ordination unto sonship and eternal life", or, briefly, "the election of grace".

12) We find our election revealed only in Christ who is the Book of Life, and only in Him can we be assured of our election. The elect are not saved by any other grace than that which is trampled under foot by them that are lost. This constrains us to "work out our salvation with fear and trembling", Phil. 2, 12. 13, which means, that we be careful to abide with Christ and His Word, that we pray diligently, that we faithfully put to use the gifts we have received, and thus "make our calling and election sure". 2 Pet. 1, 10.

13) When our faith views this eternal gracious counsel of God regarding us Christians, from which springs our entire salvation now and hereafter, we join with all our heart in the doxology of Paul in Eph. 1, 3 : "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ."

In view of the controversies waged during the last decades we deem it necessary to offer this brief presentation of the Lutheran doctrine in an extended form and, in antithetical statements, reject false presentations and errors.

A. Conversion.

I.

Without reservation we pledge our adherence to the doctrine of the Lutheran Church regarding conversion, as it is presented on the basis of Scripture in divers places in the Confessional Writings of our Church, particularly in Article 12 of the Augsburg Confession and the Apology, in the Smalcald Articles, and in Article 2 of the Formula of Concord.

1) Since the Fall man is by nature *flesh* (John 3, 6), and hence an enemy of God (Rom. 8, 7). His intellect is darkened (1 Cor. 2, 14); his will is turned away from God and directed only towards what is evil (John 8, 34; 2 Tim. 2, 26). He is dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2, 1). Being in this condition, man is of himself incapable of anything good and unfit for it. He wills, and can will and do, only that which is evil and contrary to God. This is the natural condition of all men without exception. (Rom. 3, 12; F. C. 589, 7 ; Triglotta 883, 7.)

2) Out of pure mercy God the Holy Spirit approaches these men who are spiritually dead and enemies of God by the preaching of His Word. By the preaching of the Law He desires to

bring them to a knowledge of their sins and of the anger of God ; by the preaching of the Gospel He desires to produce in them the knowledge of salvation, of the free grace of God in Christ. In this manner He desires to convert them to Himself. (A. C. 12; F. C. 601, 54; comp. page 98, 61 ; 171, 28; 173, 44 ff.) It is God's gracious will, *equally earnest towards all men*, that all be saved and that all come to the knowledge of the truth. (1 Tim. 2; 4; Fzek. 33, 11; John 3, 16.)

3) Natural man in no wise meets this gracious operation of the Holy Spirit in his heart (Rom. 9, 16; F. C. 589, 7), but *resists* it. He cannot but resist it, because he is unfit for anything good, an enemy of God, and a servant of sin. (Rom. 8, 7; F. C. 592, 17. 18; 598, 44.) He resists the grace of God with all his powers, *knowingly, intentionally, and in a hostile spirit*. (F. C. 593, 18. 22.) *Of his own accord* he *strives only* to frustrate the gracious work of God in him. This is the natural attitude of all men towards the gracious work of God by His Word as far as their own will and ability are concerned.

4) This resistance against the Word and grace of God is expressed and manifested in individuals differently, according to their characteristic traits or according to external circumstances, but it is essentially the *same* in all men. In its real essence it is nothing else than the *refusal of grace, rebellion against God and His grace*. (F. C. 609, 88.) This resistance springs from the innate evil nature of man, from original sin, and consists in the hostile opposition which man knowingly and purposely sets against grace. (F. C. 593, 21.) Over against the grace of God in His Word all men are by nature equally guilty (*in eadem culpa*, Rom. 3, 23. 24); this means, that by nature their attitude towards the work and grace of God is evil only. This applies equally to those who are converted by the- grace of God and to those who are lost by their own fault. (F. C. 716, 57. 58.)

5) Natural man cannot, by his own powers, omit, break, and hinder, nor even diminish this resistance. Man is and remains an enemy of God and resists the Word and will of God, until faith in Christ is wrought in him by the Holy Spirit. (F. C. 589, 5 ; 590, 11. 12; 593, 21 ; 602, 59.) Nor can man omit this resistance by spiritual powers which God, as some hold, confers on him before the creation of faith and which man is supposed to employ for his own conversion. This would presuppose that man after all has, by nature, or prior to faith, *a will* to convert himself and also the ability to accept, and to properly employ, the spiritual powers offered him.

6) True, even before faith is kindled a person receives in his heart various impressions of the operation of the Law and the Gospel, all kinds of emotions which he cannot evade (*motus inevitabiles*; Mark 6, 20; Luke 4, 22; Acts 24, 25; John 16, 8-11.) However, these emotions a person *suffers* by the operation of God upon him from without, independently of his own volition, yea, in opposition to the same. Before faith is kindled no inward change for the *good* takes place in the person, by which he would be enabled, even before conversion, through the operation of grace, to submit to the grace of God, to assume a passive attitude to grace, to allow the grace of God to continue its operation upon him, etc. (1 Cor. 2, 14.) On the contrary, all that man is able to do, and does, of his own accord merely tends to ward off these impressions and to suppress these emotions. Until renewed by God his will remains the same obstinate will that is at enmity with God. *There is no intermediate state between being converted and being unconverted*, between spiritual death and spiritual life. (F. C. 602, 59; 593, 20.21.)

7) God alone, by the operation of His mighty grace, can overcome this resistance in man against His grace and His Word. (Eph. 1, 19; 2, 5-10; Rom. 9, 16.) He does it by bringing a person who has learned to know his perdition by means of the Law and is terrified by God's anger, to faith in his Savior by means of the Gospel, thus drawing the person to Him, raising him from spiritual death, regenerating and renewing him. (Eph. 2, S. 9 ; F. C. 609, 87; 603, 61.) However, conversion does not take place by irresistible grace, or by coercion, which would be the same thing; for conversion consists in this very thing that God, by means of the Gospel, turns a rebellious will into an obedient will, an unwilling person into a willing one. (F. C. 603, 60; 09, 87.88.)

8) When faith is kindled man's attitude towards the Word and grace of God is entirely changed. In the power of God who works in him both to will and to do, the person *willingly assents to what God proposes*. There arise in him good emotions and sensations of a truly spiritual nature. These are the new spiritual life in him. Immediately man begins to fear, love, and trust in God. He is engaged in the daily practice of repentance and cooperates in good works which the Holy Ghost accomplishes in him. (F. C. 603, 63; 604, 65. 66605, 70; 609, 88.) Indeed, even in the regenerate there still remains a certain resistance towards the Word and grace of God. Until death they bear the sinful flesh. However, God has created in them the new man who willingly serves God. In the regenerate—and only in these—there takes place a constant struggle: the wrestling of the spirit with the flesh, in which the spirit, by the power and grace of God, is victorious and conquers the flesh as long as the Christian by faith clings to the Word and grace of God. (F. C. 608, 84. 85; Gal. 5, 17; Rom. 7, 23. 25.)

9) It is God alone who is able to convert and quicken spiritually dead men, and does convert and quicken them by His grace in the Word. But, alas, not all men are converted and saved. *This is in no wise God's fault. His grace is universal (universalis); it is sufficient (sufficiens) for all, and efficacious (efficax) in all who hear the Word.* By the preaching of His Word God gives to all who hear it an opportunity to be converted and saved. God purposed to be efficacious in all through the Word, to give to all the power and ability to accept His Word. (F. C. 710, 29.) However, the grace of God does *not operate in an irresistible manner*. Man can resist it and block the way to the Holy Spirit and His operations of grace, so that He cannot achieve His work in man. Anyone resisting the Holy Spirit continually and persistently, anyone thrusting the grace of God from him continually and wilfully, is not converted, but is lost by his own fault. (F. C. 602, 57-60; 713, 40-42.)

10) Accordingly, we confess

a) that conversion is solely and alone the work of divine grace which man by nature does nothing but resist, and cannot but resist, until God gives him faith;

b) that God earnestly desires to work conversion in all men, but "cannot perform His work" in them that are lost (F. C. 555, 12; Triglotta 835, 12), because by their own fault they wilfully persevere in their resistance, harden themselves and become increasingly obdurate in this condition the more earnestly God operates on them by means of His Word, and thus continue to heap up guilt against themselves (Matth. 23, 37), until finally they may be overtaken by the condemnation of hardening.

II. Antitheses.

On the basis of this truth we reject as contrary to Scripture and false any teaching by which the utter incapacity of all men for anything that is good in a spiritual respect and the monergism of divine grace in the conversion and salvation of men are denied and obscured; we also reject any teaching which finds the ultimate cause of the non-conversion even of a single person in God and His means of grace and which charges Him in any way with the fault of such non-conversion; as, for instance, the teaching

1) that man by his own natural powers or by powers communicated to him by the grace of God can in any manner omit or diminish his resistance—whether it be of the “natural” or the “willful” kind—against the gracious operation of God; or that he can in any manner contribute anything to his conversion, cooperate with God towards it, or prepare and make himself fit for the same;

2) that prior to faith man himself, either of his own accord or through powers given to him by grace, can determine to submit to the grace that is to convert him, or to allow converting grace to continue its operation upon him. This “decision in favor of God” does not precede conversion (in the strict sense) but is the very conversion which God works;

3) We also reject as false and contrary to Scripture the distinction between natural and wilful resistance for the purpose of offering a uniform⁸⁵³ explanation why it is that some remain in perdition and are lost while others are converted and saved though all are equally guilty and maintain only an evil attitude towards the converting grace of God, and though grace works with equal power upon all men. By this teaching conversion and salvation are made to depend not on the grace of God alone, but also on man's conduct.

4) Again, we reject the teaching which makes non-conversion and rejection dependent not solely upon a person's conduct, but rather on a secret decree of God; a teaching which conceals or denies that the cause, the only cause, of non-conversion is man's wilful and persistent resistance, i.e., that he either does not hear God's Word, but wilfully despises it, closes his ear and hardens his heart against it and thus blocks the way which the Holy Ghost ordinarily pursues, so that He cannot perform His work in him, or, having heard it, puts it aside and disregards it;

5) Again, the teaching which employs the term "almighty grace" in the sense that God converts men by irresistible grace or by coercion;

6) Again, the teaching that in order to accomplish conversion, universal grace must be reinforced by a secret grace of election which is withheld from those who are not converted;

7) Again, the teaching that God by a secret decree has excluded from conversion those who are not converted, or has passed them by with His grace;

8) Again, the teaching that God, while imparting a certain measure of grace to all, imparts only to the elect the full measure of grace sufficient for conversion.

B. Universal Will of Grace.

1) Scripture teaches that everything which God has done, is doing and will do in time here on earth, in order to acquire and appropriate to men salvation in Christ, He does in accordance with an eternal, premeditated will, counsel, and purpose. (Acts 15, 18; Eph. 1, 11.)

2) God has taken pity on the fallen race of men. In the fulness of time He has sent into the world for all men His onlybegotten Son, who has *acquired* perfect salvation for all, for each individual, also for me. God has done this in accordance with an eternal, premeditated counsel and will. Before the foundation of the world, He has foreordained Christ as the Redeemer of the entire human race. (Acts 2, 23; 4, 28; 1 Pet. 1, 20.)

3) This fact, that Christ has fully acquired complete salvation for all men, God has also *revealed and made known* to all men *in the Word of the Gospel*. This Gospel of His He causes to be preached here in the world, in order that men may hear it, and thereby come to the knowledge of the truth, and thus be saved. God has done and is doing this in accordance with an eternal purpose and counsel. (Eph. 1, 9.)

4) Through the Gospel which is His ever equally efficacious means and instrument with all men, the Holy Ghost approaches the individual sinner, lost by nature, but redeemed by Christ. After having brought the sinner to a knowledge of his utter depravity and having terrified him with the anger and judgment of God by means of the Law, the Holy Spirit earnestly purposes to bring him to faith in his Savior and thus to appropriate to him the entire salvation acquired by Christ, to justify him, to preserve him in faith by the Word, to glorify him and in this manner to carry out His work of grace unto the end. God does this in accordance with an eternal counsel and purpose.

⁸⁵³ A uniform explanation of conversion and non-conversion is offered by Synergists when they place the cause of both in man. A uniform explanation of conversion and non-conversion is offered by Calvinists when they place the cause of both in God.

From the doctrine of the Lutheran Church regarding the universal will of grace, presented in the foregoing, there is kept distinct in Scripture

C. The Doctrine of the Election of Grace or of God's Predestination Unto the Adoption of Children and Unto Salvation.

Without reservation we pledge our adherence to the doctrine of the Lutheran Church regarding the election of grace, or predestination of man unto sonship, as it has been presented, on the basis of Scripture, in the Eleventh Article of the Formula of Concord.

Preamble.

In order to think and speak correctly concerning the election of grace, and in order not to exceed the barriers fixed in this doctrine by Scripture, we must learn from Scripture also the proper mode of presenting this doctrine. The apostle takes the position of the Christian readers here in time (Rom. 8, 28ff. ; Eph. 1, 3ff.) ; he reminds them of the blessing which they hold in their possession at present; then he directs their gaze backward to the pretemporal source of that blessing. He identifies himself and his fellow-Christians with the elect. Thus he would have us contemplate the eternal election of God. True, Scripture also refers elsewhere, though briefly, to the elect whom God has chosen, to the elect who are few in number as compared with the many that are called. (Matth. 22, 14.) But wherever the apostles instruct Christians more fully regarding the mystery of eternity they apply what they say to those in particular whom they are teaching. Such a direct, practical mode of contemplating the mystery guards us against unprofitable and dangerous speculations.

I.

1) Holy Scripture teaches that *it is God alone who*, by grace for Christ's sake, has called us and all believers by means of the Gospel; has brought us unto faith, sanctifies and keeps us in faith, and finally saves us. However, Scripture teaches likewise that everything which God does now and will yet do for us and all believers *He has already in eternity considered in His counsel and resolved to do*. (2 Tim. 1, 9; Rom. 8, 29; Eph. 1, 3-5; 2 Thess. 2, 13.) Conformably to Scripture and the Confessions of our Church we call this eternal purpose of God to save us and all believers according to the universal way of salvation the foreknowing of God (Rom. 8, 29), or God's predestination of men unto the adoption of children (Eph. 1, 5 ; Rom. 8, 29), or the eternal election unto the adoption of children (Eph. 1, 4), or the election of grace (Rom. 11, 5).

2) The eternal election, or God's predestination unto the adoption of children, is that eternal act by which God has prepared our salvation, not only in general, but has also in particular considered in His grace us and every one of His own, has elected us unto salvation and has decreed that, and in what way, He will call us by the Gospel, bring us to faith, keep us therein, and finally give us eternal life in Christ (Eph. 1, Off. ; Rom. 8, 28ff. ; 1 Pet. 1, 2 ; F. C. 707, 13-24; Triglotta 1067 ff.)

3) The cause of this eternal act of God concerning His children *is solely the mercy of God and the most holy merits of Christ*, who by His living, suffering, and dying has redeemed all men and reconciled them unto God. In ourselves *there is not found anything* that could in any way have prompted God to make this gracious plan concerning us. This applies also to our faith, which is not a presupposition, but a result and an effect of the predestination unto the adoption of children. (Eph. 1, 4, 5; 2 Tim. 1, 9 ; Rom. 8, 28-30; F. C. 557, 20; Triglotta 837; F. C. 720, 75; Triglotta 1087; F. C. 723, 88; Triglotta 1093.)

4) Accordingly, election, or predestination, is the *cause* which effects and consummates our salvation and whatever pertains thereto (hence also our faith and our perseverance therein). Upon this immutable and insubvertible counsel of God our salvation is so firmly established *that*

the devil, the world, and our flesh cannot deprive us of it. (John 10, 28-30; Matth. 16, 18; F. C. 705, 8 ; Triglotta 106S; F. C. 714, 45-49; Triglotta 1079.)

5) *Every Christian can and should by faith be certain of his election unto everlasting life.* He does not obtain this assurance by his natural reasoning, nor by way of the Law as he reviews his good deeds, but from the Gospel promises of grace, which are sealed by the sacraments. Accordingly, it is to the believer an insubvertible assurance; an assurance, however, which does not exclude the necessity that the Christian work out his own salvation with fear and trembling, yea, prompts him to do so. (Rom. 8, 31-39; Eph. 1, 13.14; Phil. 2, 12. 13; 2 Pet. 1, 10; Hebr. 11, 1; F. C. 709, 25-33; Triglotta 1071 ff. ; F. C. 714, 45; Triglotta 1079.)

6) The election of grace, or predestination unto the adoption of children and unto salvation, which pertains only to us and all believers, is in no wise in contradiction to God's universal will of grace to save all men through Christ. While, on the one hand, the universal will of grace is the firm foundation on which the election of grace rests, the election of grace, on the other hand, serves the purpose of giving the Christian a greater assurance of the universal will of grace, for it is the eternal decree of God to carry into effect this universal will of grace in us and all believers. Accordingly, by the election of grace there is effected in us, the elect, not a second, different will of grace, but the identical universal will which God earnestly entertains regarding all men, and which is frustrated in those that perish by their persistent wilful resistance.

7) This election of grace is not paralleled by an *election of wrath*, by a predestination of individual men unto perdition, by God's passing most men by with the fulness of His grace, by leaving them in their misery, by a will to work less in them, by a will to draw them less powerfully, and the like. On the contrary, God wills earnestly that all men be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. The damnation of those who are lost is not due, either directly or indirectly, to God, nor to His decree of election, nor to the execution of the same, but solely to the malice of men. (Matth. 22, 1 ff.; 23, 37; Acts 7, 51; 2 Thess. 2, 10-12; Rom. 1, 18 ff.; F. C. 555, 12; Triglotta 835; F. C. 711, 34-42; Triglotta 1075; F. C. 721; 78-86; Triglotta 1089.)

8) In regard to the election of grace and to reprobation there is, indeed, much that God has not revealed in His Word, and that men presumptuously desire to know. Our Confessions enumerate many mysteries of this kind, among them the following : "Likewise, when we see that God gives His Word at one place, but not at another; removes it from one place, and allows it to remain at another; also, that one is hardened, blinded, given over to a reprobate mind, while another, who is indeed in the same guilt, is converted again, etc.—in these and similar questions Paul fixes a certain limit to us how far we should go, namely that in the one part we should recognize God's judgment. For they are well-deserved penalties of sins when God so punishes a land or nation for despising His Word that the punishment extends also to their posterity, as is to be seen in the Jews; whereby God in some lands and persons exhibits His severity to those that are His, in order to indicate what we all would have well deserved, and would be worthy and worth to receive, since we conduct ourselves evilly over against God's Word, and often grieve the Holy Ghost sorely; in order that we may live in the fear of God, and acknowledge and praise God's goodness, to the exclusion of, and contrary to, our merit, in and with us to whom He gives His Word and allows it to abide, and whom He does not harden and reject." (F. C. 715, 54-57; Triglotta 1081.) We are not to brood over these unsearchable mysteries, *but to cling to the clear Word of God, in which everything that we need to know for our salvation is plainly stated.* (F. C. 711, 33; Triglotta 1073.)

In those who perish by their own fault we are to perceive the great earnestness of God and His appalling judgment against sin, and thus be moved all the more to live constantly in the fear of God, seeing that we deserve the same fate as the reprobates, because by nature we also have only an evil attitude towards the Word of God.

In ourselves who are saved we are to perceive the pure grace of God, glorify and praise it all the more and render thanks to God also in this way that we apply all diligence to make our calling and election sure. Anything that exceeds these limits we subordinate to the statement of Scripture in Rom. 11, 33-36. (F. C. 716, 58-64; Triglotta 1081.)

II. Antitheses.

1) On the basis of these truths we reject every teaching which places the cause of election or predestination unto the adoption of children *not solely* in God's universal earnest grace and mercy and in the merits of Christ, or, generally speaking, every teaching which in any form and manner, or in any respect bases election on and explains it by, what man is, what he has, does, or refrains from doing.

2) On the other hand, however, we also reject on the basis of these truths every teaching by which those who believe only for a season are numbered with the elect; any teaching which in any manner mingles unbelief or backsliding as well as punishment and judgment of God with the doctrine of the election of grace, and thus confounds Law and Gospel; any teaching by which different and mutually contradictory wills of grace are placed in God: any teaching by which an *irresistible* and *partial* grace is fictitiously ascribed to God; in short, any view which directly or indirectly, overtly or covertly, in any way conflicts with the doctrine of Scripture regarding the *one universal grace which is equally earnest and efficacious towards all*, and which in any way limits the Word of God which states that God would have all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. For instance,

a) the teaching that God has elected us Christians to salvation *in preference to others* (*prae aliis*), by granting us, in addition to universal grace which exists and is efficacious for all, an altogether particular grace, namely, an "election grace" by which He would lead us surely and infallibly to salvation in preference to others;

b) the teaching that it is due to this "election grace" that the means of grace effect conversion and salvation in some and not in others;

c) the teaching that it is a divine mystery, that is, a mystery in God, why the means of grace do not effect conversion in many.

Declaration Regarding the Phrase "*Intuitu Fidei Finalis*."

1) If the term "election" or selection in view of persevering faith (*intuitu fidei finalis*) is interpreted in this manner only, that God has decreed from eternity to give on Judgment Day—for the sake of the merits of Christ imputed to them—the crown of glory to those whom He Himself by His grace has brought to faith and has kept in faith unto the end, and whom by virtue of His omniscience He knows from eternity;—then such an interpretation expresses, indeed, a truth which is clearly revealed in Scripture, and which, moreover, as far it concerns the last of the decrees passed by God regarding the elect, can, indeed, be included in election or predestination unto the adoption of children and unto salvation. But neither in Scripture nor in the Confessions is this action called election or predestination unto adoption and salvation. What Scripture and the Confessions call election has not taken place "*intuitu fidei*" (see C. I. 1 and 2).

2) It is wrong to call the truths just outlined a second form of the doctrine of God's election and predestination unto adoption of children and unto salvation, yea, rather we are confronted with two entirely different truths, which cannot be designated by *one* term without creating boundless confusion.

The doctrine of predestination unto adoption of children and the selection of those who continue in faith to the end unto everlasting glory differ in many points. For

a) the former treats of the entire salvation accorded to us (eight points) in all its details; the latter treats *only* of the last part, the consummation (*glorificatio*);

b) the former views the creation and preservation of faith as the result and as the execution of God's plan; the latter views the merits of Christ, apprehended by faith and kept to the end, as the basis and presupposition of the eternal decree of God;

c) the former knows of only *one* basis for the decree of God, viz., the grace of God and the merits of Christ viewed as having been prepared; the latter knows as the basis the grace of God and the merits of Christ viewed as having been apprehended by faith and kept to the end;

d) the former understands by "electing" the action in eternity by which men are taken from the kingdom of darkness and transferred to the kingdom of grace; the latter understands by "electing" the segregating, the singling out of one in preference to others for the purpose of ushering him into heaven.

e) the former understands by "the elect" people who are in a state of grace; the latter understands by "the elect" those who in the sight of God are believers at the last;

f) the former answers the questions: Whence is my past, present, and future salvation? the latter the question: Why has God decreed in eternity to place certain definite persons at His right hand?

g) the former is, according to F. C. 9-11 and 12ff., the way to think and speak "correctly and profitably" of the predestination unto adoption of children; the latter is a different way of speaking regarding the action of God in eternity.

3) It is an undeniable fact that by the rise of the doctrine of an election *intuitu fidei finalis* and by divergent use of the term "election" involved in this doctrine trouble and confusion have been caused; the doctrine of the Eleventh Article of the Formula of Concord has thereby been pushed to the background; and an unsound mixture has been produced out of both.

4) Since the Lutheran Church binds its ministers by a pledge to adhere to the Confessions, the doctrine of election or predestination unto adoption of children and unto eternal life, that is, their being ordained unto the adoption of children etc., is the only doctrine within the Church which may justly claim to be the Church's doctrine of eternal election.

5) Accordingly, the only way to establish peace in the church is for all to accustom themselves to speak as the Scriptures and the Confessions speak.

Declaration Regarding the Phrase "*Cur alii prae aliis?*"

As regards the use of the question : "Why are some converted in preference to others?" since God's grace and men's guilt are the same, we declare the following:

A. If the question presupposes that in the last analysis there is, either in God or in man, a uniform cause of conversion and non-conversion, of election and reprobation, the question must be rejected as false in itself and involving an error that utterly subverts a fundamental truth. Scripture and the Confessions know of no identical cause.

1) Scriptures teaches quite clearly whence it is that men are converted and saved: *that is due solely to the grace of God*, and in no respect to the activity or conduct of man. (See Theses on Conversion I, 1-7.)

2) With equal clearness Scripture teaches whence it is that men are not converted and saved, but remain in their lost, sinful condition : *that is solely their own fault* ("they would not") and in no wise the fault of God. (See Theses on Conversion I, 9.)

3) By means of our reason we cannot harmonize these two Scripture truths, viz., that the grace of God is the only cause of conversion, and that man's fault is the only cause of non-conversion, just as we, by means of our reason, cannot bring Law and Gospel into harmony. (See Theses on Conversion II, 3, with the footnote.)

4) Nor can we in many instances harmonize God's activity in the world with His revealed will.

We cannot and will not attempt to solve these mysteries, since Scripture does not solve them. Therefore, on the basis of Rom. 11, 33-36, in agreement with the Confession of our Church, we declare: F. C., Art. XI, 52-64, M. 715ff., Triglotta 1079ff.

B. The question is admissible, however, if the words "*prae aliis*" do not imply a grace that exists exclusively for the elect (*gratia particularis; praeteritio*), but are used only for the purpose of calling attention to the mystery referred to in A, points 3 and 4.

We should, however, like to point out, in particular, that the bare question "*Cur alii prae aliis?*" may easily lead to misunderstanding, and for that reason should be avoided.

D. Theses on Other Doctrines.

I. The Scriptures.

1) We pledge adherence to the Holy Scriptures as the only source and norm of doctrine and faith. (2 Tim. 3, 16; 2 Pet. 1, 19-21.) Over against modern theology we maintain, now as formerly, the doctrine of the verbal inspiration. (1 Cor. 2, 13; 2 Tim. 3, 16.) We believe and confess that Scripture not only contains God's Word, but is God's Word, and hence no errors or contradictions of any sort are found therein.

2) Accordingly, to us all doctrines and statements contained in Scripture are insubvertibly established, and our conscience is bound by them. (John 10, 35.) Although some of them may seem, or be, more important or less important to our life of faith, still as regards their divine character all statements of Scripture are, to us, on the same level.

3) On the other hand, we maintain likewise that only such things as are revealed in Scripture can be an object of faith and doctrine. Although a doctrine may not offend against Scripture, no one has a right to believe or teach something as divine truth without or beyond the authority of Scripture. No error, though it seem ever so insignificant, can claim any right whatsoever.

II. Our Position As Regards the Lutheran Confessions.

4) Our Confessions are a presentation and summary of the faith of the Lutheran Church, as it has found expression in its response to needs arising from time to time. They do not claim to be anything else than a confession of the faith dwelling in the heart, and of the saving truth to be preached in the Church of God.

5) We pledge adherence to all the Confessions of the Lutheran Church contained in the Book of Concord of 1580, not "in so far as", but "because" they are a presentation of the pure doctrine of the divine Word.

6) Accordingly, any person assuming the office of teacher in our Church must obligate himself to conduct his office in accordance with the aforementioned Confessions.

7) The pledge to adhere to the Confessions relates only to the doctrinal contents (that is, to the doctrine proclaimed as divine truth and to the rejection of contradictory teachings); however, it relates to these doctrinal contents without exception and limitation in every article and part, no matter whether a doctrine is stated expressly as a confessional doctrine, or whether it is adduced only casually for the purpose of explaining, substantiating, etc. some other doctrine.

8) On the other hand, anything that pertains merely to the form of the presentation (historical remarks, purely exegetical questions, etc.) is not binding.

III. Church Fellowship.

9) Church fellowship, that is mutual recognition of Christians as brethren of the faith and their cooperation in church activities, presupposes, according to God's Word and our Confessions, their agreement in the pure doctrine of the Gospel and in the confession of the same by word and deed. (Matth. 7, 15; Rom. 16, 17; Gal. 1, 8 ; Tit. 3, 10; 2 John 10. 11; M. 40, Art. 7 ; 337, 42; 561, 30; p. 16; Triglotta 47. 517. 843. 19.)

Ignoring doctrinal differences existing at the time when church fellowship is being established and maintained or declaring them to be of no import is unionism which fictitiously presents a unity that does not exist.

10) The rule is: "Lutheran pulpits for Lutheran pastors only; Lutheran altars for Lutheran communicants only". Pulpit and altar fellowship without unity in doctrine is a denial of the truth and a sin committed against the erring.

11) Church fellowship with a church body which persistently clings to an error in doctrine and practice must ultimately be dissolved, because unity has already been disrupted by that error.

12) Wherever disagreement in the confession of the one divinely revealed truth arises through the deception of Satan or the frailty of the flesh, it devolves upon us to confess the truth of the divine Word, which alone can overcome error and close the breach.

13) Such confession is done by word and deed, and requires, in the first place, that we take our stand firmly with those who confess the truth in its purity, and, in the second place, that we oppose those who falsify the truth to any degree.

Note. How an error of this kind must be treated in individual instances, however, and how long the erring must be tolerated in the hope that he can be led to forsake his error, is a problem to be solved by the brotherly love of Christians.

IV. The Church

14) The Church of Christ on earth, established and being built up by the Holy Spirit through the means of grace, is composed of all true believers, that is the totality of those who put their trust in the vicarious living, suffering, and dying of Christ and are united with one another by nothing else than this common faith.

15) Accordingly, we confess with the Apology: "However, the Christian Church consists not alone in fellowship of outward marks, but it consists chiefly in inward communion of eternal blessings in the heart, as of the Holy Ghost, of faith, of the fear and love of God. And yet, this same Church has also external marks by which it may be known; namely, where there is pure use of God's Word and the Sacraments are administered in conformity with the same, there certainly is the Church, there are Christians; and this Church only is called the body of Christ in the Scriptures." (NI. 152, 5 ; Triglotta 227.)

V. The Spiritual Priesthood.

16) Christ has made all believers kings and priests in the sight of God, His Father, and, in the saving Gospel and in the Sacraments, has bestowed upon them as such all the spiritual possessions which He has acquired by His redemption.

17) Every Christian is to exercise this universal priesthood by his testimony in behalf of the saving truth, according to opportunity and the measure of his knowledge and ability.

VI. The Pastoral Office.

18) As distinct from the universal priesthood, the pastoral office, as regards its essence and purpose, consists in this, that a person qualified for this office and duly called to the same edifies, teaches, and governs a certain congregation in Christ's stead by means of God's Word, and administers the Sacraments in its midst.

19) This office is of divine institution, and its functions, aforementioned, are precisely defined in God's Word. Accordingly it is the right and duty of every Christian congregation to establish this office, and this is done by means of calling a pastor. Such action is a function of the universal priesthood.

20) The calling of a pastor is a right of that congregation in which the minister is to discharge the duties of the office, and by such calling Christ appoints His ministers for the congregation. Ordination is not a divine, but an ecclesiastical ordinance for the public and solemn confirmation of the pastor's call.

VII. Antichrist.

21) As regards Antichrist, we confess with the Smalcald Articles that the Pope is "the very antichrist" (M. 308, 10-14; Triglotta 475), for among all the antichristian manifestations in the history of the Church down to the present time there is none in which all the characteristics predicted in 2 Thess. 2 are found as in the papacy. The papacy, then, being the hereditary enemy of the Church, must be fought with all earnestness. So much can be clearly seen from 2 Thess. 2.

22) Whether there will yet be a special development of the antichristian power, and of what character this will be, cannot be determined from the Word of God—a fact with which our faith has to be content.

VIII. Chiliasm.

23) Every teaching of a millenium (Rev. 20) which turns the kingdom of Jesus Christ into an external, earthly, and secular kingdom of glory, or in any manner denies the permanent crossbearing character of the Church on earth is to be rejected as a doctrine that is in contradiction to clear statements of Scripture.

24) Even a conception of the millenium which does not bear this more or less physical character, but merely holds that a season of spiritual flourishing for the Church, or a general conversion of the Jews, or a resurrection of the martyrs prior to the last clay, and similar events are still to be expected, has, on the one hand, no clear word of Scripture to support it, and, on the other hand, is contradicted by words of Scripture that are quite clear. For this reason it must not be preached as a doctrine of Scripture. (See above D, I, 3.)

IX. Sunday.

25) Luther's explanation of the Third Commandment in the Small and in the Large Catechism is a masterly presentation of this subject as regards contents, form, and spirit.

26) Every addition to the same which in any manner prescribes some external feature, like a day or a form for worship, as commanded by God, is not in accord with Scripture or the Confessions.

X. Open Questions.

Since the phrase "open questions" is understood in various ways, we declare the following:

27) We reject as a grievous error the attempt to designate as open questions such questions as, notwithstanding the fact that they have been answered in God's Word, are to remain undecided and uncertain until they have been decided by a verdict of the Church, thus leaving every body at liberty until then to hold his own opinion and to teach concerning them what he pleases. All doctrines clearly and plainly revealed in God's Word are definitely decided because of the unconditional authority of the divine Word, no matter whether the Confessions say anything about them or not. There exists in the Church no right whatever to deviate in any manner from the Word of God.

28) However, if by open questions are understood such questions as are not answered by Scripture, though they are suggested in the Scriptures or by the Scriptures, a difference of opinion in answering them is permissible, provided that in doing so the teaching of Scripture is not contradicted. Human opinions of this kind, however, must not be represented as doctrines of Scripture, because they go beyond Scripture. (See above D, 1,3).

29) We recognize, indeed, that in an attempt to define the extent of the term "open questions" we meet with a difficulty. Practically, however, in any controversial case when the point in controversy is to be defined, it will be made plain by a thorough study of Scripture, whether we are dealing with an article of faith or a so-called problem in theology. In the latter case a difference in conviction must not be regarded as a cause for church division, because the authority of Scripture is not impugned.

The principle expressed in the Confessions we are to heed "That a distinction should and must by all means be observed between unnecessary and useless wrangling, on the one hand, whereby the Church ought not to be disturbed, since it destroys more than it builds up, and necessary controversy, on the other hand, as when a controversy occurs such as involves the articles of faith or the chief heads of the Christian doctrine, where for the defense of the truth the false opposite doctrine must be reproved." (M. 572, 15; Triglotta 857.)

With reference to the above Theses adopted by representatives of the Buffalo, Iowa, Ohio, Missouri, and Wisconsin Synods the following separate declaration was offered by two members of the Committee, to be recorded in the minutes

Separate Declaration.

The Theses treat the doctrine of election, or of the predestination unto adoption of children *a posteriori*, that is, from the viewpoint of believing Christians, and answer the question: "Whence is my present, past, and future salvation?" We concede the right to take thus view, and also give it the preference for practical ends. However, we cannot share the opinion that Scripture and the Confessions present the doctrine of election chiefly from this viewpoint, and that, accordingly, *only* this form of the doctrine is to be authorized in the Church.

Furthermore, we cannot say that the so-called second form of the doctrine which has been used by our Church for more than three hundred years, gives expression to another "doctrine"; we regard it rather another "method of teaching", by which the right doctrine of election can be maintained to its full extent.

As regards the doctrinal contents of the Theses, we are in complete harmony therewith.

We offer this declaration, partly because we wish to act in perfect sincerity, partly because we cannot admit that our Lutheran Church for the entire period of three hundred years did not possess the right doctrine of election or of the predestination unto adoption of children.

W. D. Ahl
M. P. F. Doermann

Committee:
Lorenz Blankenbuelaler (Missouri).
A. W. Walck (Buffalo).
A. D. Cotterman. (Ohio).
Karl Ermisch (Iowa).
 St. Paul, Minn., June 21, 1929.

For his kind help in the preparation of this translation Prof. W. H. T. Dau deserves honorable mention.

Lord Jesus Christ, with us abide,
 For round us falls the eventide ;
 Let not Thy Word, that heav'nly light,
 For us be ever veiled in night.

O keep us in thy Word, we pray ;
 The guile and rage of Satan stay;
 Unto Thy Church grant, Lord, Thy grace,
 Peace, concord, patience, fearlessness.

And since the cause and glory, Lord,
 Are Thine, not ours, do Thou afford
 Us help and strength and constancy,
 With all our heart we trust in Thee.

A. C. Haase, Secretary.
 SOLI DEO GLORIA!

Chicago Theses (1919)⁸⁵⁴
Hans Stub

- i. In regard to the Work of Christ, Redemption, and Reconciliation:
 Jesus Christ, God and Man, has not only for the benefit of, but in the place of the human race, taken upon Himself the sins of the world with the just penalties for them. In the place of the world and for its benefit, He has, by His holy life, fulfilled the law, and, by his suffering and death, by his blood, paid the penalty for the whole world, truly and completely satisfied the divine justice, redeemed the world from guilt and punishment of sin, and brought about reconciliation of God, whose wrath had come upon mankind on account of sin and whose justice required satisfaction.
- ii. In regard to the Gospel:
 The Gospel is not only a story, a narrative of what Jesus Christ has done, but at the same time it offers and gives the result of the work of Christ—above all, forgiveness of sin. Yea, it even at the same time gives the power to accept what it offers.
- iii. In regard to Absolution:
 Absolution does not essentially differ from the forgiveness of sin offered by the Gospel. The only difference is that absolution is the direct application of forgiveness of sin to the individual desiring the consolation of the Gospel. Absolution is not a judgment passed by the pastor on those being absolved, declaring that they now have forgiveness.
- iv. In regard to Holy Baptism and the Gospel:
 The Holy Ghost works regeneration of the sinner through Baptism and the Gospel. Both are therefore justly called the means of regeneration.
- v. In regard to Justification:
 Justification is not an act in man but an act by God in heaven, declaring the repentant and believing just, or stating that he is regarded as such on account of the imputation of the righteousness of Christ by faith.
- vi. In regard to Faith:
 Faith is not in any measure a human effort. Faith is an act of man insofar as it is man who believes. But both the power to believe and the act of believing are God's work and gift in the human soul or heart.
- vii. In regard to Conversion:
 Conversion as the word is commonly used in our Lutheran Confessions comprises contrition and faith produced by the Law and the Gospel. If man is not converted, the responsibility and guilt fall on him because he in spite of God's all-sufficient grace through the call, "would Not" according to the Word of Christ, Matthew 23:37: "How often would I have gathered thy children even as a hen gathers her chickens under her wing, and ye were would not."
 If a man is converted the glory belongs to God alone, whose work of grace it is throughout. Before conversion or in conversion, there is no cooperation of man, but the very moment man is converted, cooperation begins through the new powers given in conversion;

⁸⁵⁴ The Chicago Theses (1919) are printed in Fred W. Meuser. *The Formation of the American Lutheran Church*. (Columbus: The Wartburg Press, 1958) 293-295.

though this cooperation is never independent of the Holy Spirit, but always “to such an extent and so long as God by His holy Spirit rules, guides, and leads him.” Form. Concord.

viii. In regard to Election::

The causes of election to salvation are the mercy of god and the most holy merit of Christ; nothing in us on account of which God has elected us to eternal life.

On the one hand we reject all forms of synergism which in any way would deprive God of His glory as the only Savior. On the other hand we reject all forms of Calvinism which directly or indirectly would conflict with the order of salvation, and would not give to all a full and equally great opportunity of salvation, or which in any manner would violate the Word of God which says that God will have all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. I Timothy 2:4.

Minneapolis Theses 1925⁸⁵⁵

I. *The Scriptures.*

The synods signatory to these Articles of Agreement accept without exception all the canonical books of the Old and the New Testaments as a whole, and in all their parts, as the divinely inspired, revealed, and inerrant Word of God, and submit to this as the only infallible authority in all matters of faith and life.

“II. *The Lutheran Symbols.*

1. These synods also, without reservation, accept the symbolical books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, not insofar as, but because they are the presentation and explanation of the pure doctrine of the Word of God and a summary of the faith of the Lutheran Church, as this has found expression in response to the exigencies arising from time to time.

(The Norwegian Lutheran Church of America, in agreement with the position of the Lutheran Church in Norway and Denmark, has officially accepted only the three Ecumenical Creeds, the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, and Luther's Small Catechism. This position does not imply that the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America in any way whatsoever rejects the remaining symbolical books of the Lutheran Church, as the constant reference to them in her theological literature amply testify, but since the other symbolical books are not known to her constituency generally, it has not been deemed necessary to require formal subscription to the entire Book of Concord.)

2. Adherence to our confessions pertains only to their doctrinal content, (i.e., the doctrines declared to be divine truth and the rejection of opposite doctrines), but to these without exception or limitation in all parts, no matter whether a doctrine is specifically cited as a confession or incidentally introduced for the purpose of elucidating or proving some other doctrine. All that pertains to the form of presentation (historical comments, questions purely exegetical, etc.) is not binding.

III. *Church Fellowship.*

1. These synods agree that true Christians are found in every denomination which has so much of divine truth revealed in Holy Scripture that children of God can be born in it; that according to the Word of God and our confessions, church fellowship, that is, mutual recognition, altar and pulpit fellowship, and eventually cooperation in the strictly essential work of the church, presupposes unanimity in the pure doctrine of the Gospel and in the confession of the same in word and deed.

Where the establishment and maintenance of church fellowship ignores present doctrinal differences or declares them a matter of indifference, there is unionism, pretense of union which does not exist.

2. They agree that the rule, 'Lutheran pulpits for Lutheran pastors only, and Lutheran altars for Lutheran communicants only,' is not only in full accord with, but necessarily implied in, the teachings of the divine Word and the Confessions of the evangelical Lutheran Church. This rule, implying the rejection of all unionism and syncretism, must be observed as setting forth a principle elementary to sound and conservative Lutheranism.”

⁸⁵⁵ The Minneapolis Theses are printed in Fred W. Meuser. *The Formation of the American Lutheran Church*. (Columbus: The Wartburg Press, 1958) 295-296.

IV. *In points of doctrine*

In 1920 all synods with the exception of Buffalo (to which they had not been submitted) adopted theses on:

1. The Work of Christ
2. The Gospel
3. Absolution
4. Holy Baptism
5. Justification
6. Faith
7. Conversion
8. Election

See the Chicago Theses 1919.

After discussion of these theses the representatives present came to the conclusion that we are in full agreement in all essentials pertaining to these doctrines.

V. *The Lodge Question.*

1. These synods agree that all organizations or societies, secret or open, as are either avowedly religious or practise the forms of religion without confessing as a matter of principle the Triune God or Jesus Christ as the Son of God, come into the flesh, and our Savior from sin, or teach instead of the Gospel, salvation by human works or morality, are anti-Christian and destructive of the best interests of the church and the individual soul, and that, therefore, the Church of Christ and its congregations can have no fellowship with them.

2. They agree that a Lutheran synod should not tolerate pastors who have affiliated themselves with any anti-Christian society. And they admonish their pastors and congregations to testify against the sin of lodgery and to put forth earnest efforts publicly and privately to enlighten and persuade persons who are members of anti-Christian societies, to sever their connection with such organizations.

VI. *Recognition*

The representatives of the synods here present agree that the synods accepting these articles are one in doctrine and practice, recognize each other as truly Lutheran and may enter into pulpit and altar fellowship.

The presidents of the synods here represented are asked to present this Agreement to their respective synods for adoption.

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